STUDY: HOMEWORK IS NO BURDEN IN U.S. 12 | "DO WHAT'S RIGHT" INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT GALLAGHER 14-15 | BOOK REVIEWS 7, 17-19

School Reform News

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Uneducated Youth Threaten America's Future

Lawmakers urged to "come out of the closet" on school choice

by George A. Clowes

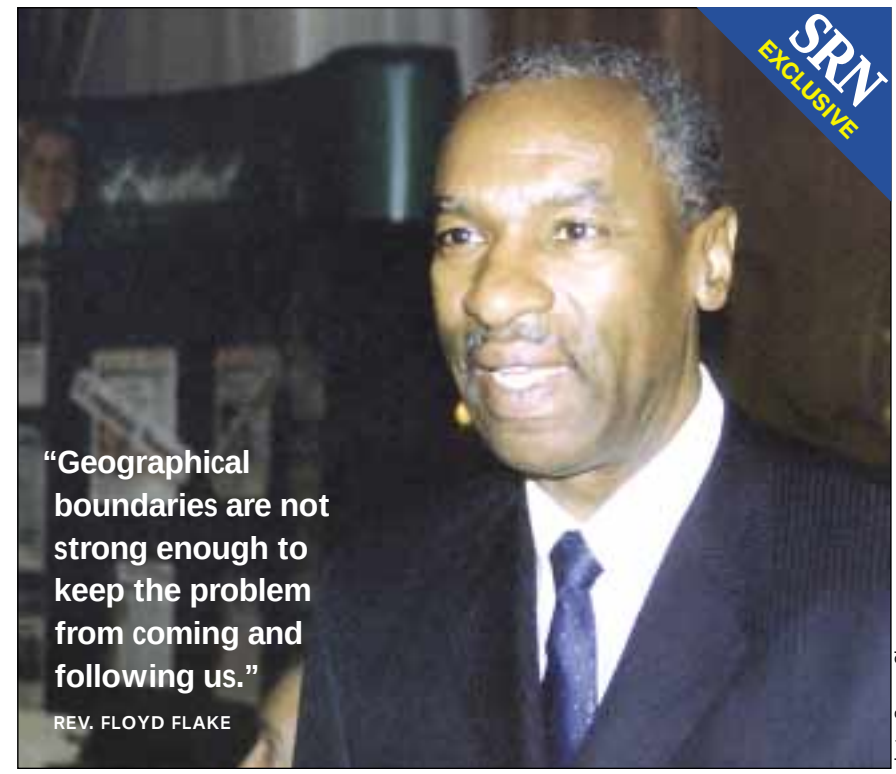
Despite an increasing awareness that the U.S. public education system offers widely differing educational opportunities to different ethnic and income groups, the system will change for the better only when it is exposed to competition from charter schools or vouchers, said former U.S. Representative Reverend Floyd H. Flake, speaking in Chicago on October 16 at the Nineteenth Anniversary Annual Benefit for The Heartland Institute.

"If we do not take a stand [for school choice] now, the problem will only worsen," Flake said. As long as the public school system poorly educates young people, leaving them with few skills to earn a decent living, it spawns a criminal environment of "internal terrorism" where robberies become more prevalent and where wars are fought to control turf for selling illegal drugs. Now, warned Flake, that environment is spreading from urban areas to bordering communities.

"The problem does not go away; the problem merely changes its address," he said. "Geographical boundaries are not strong enough to keep the problem from coming and following us. We cannot run far enough to get away from the problem if we don't solve the problem of properly educating our young people."

Flake has had first-hand experience restoring the health of an urban community. As senior pastor of the 10,000-member Allen African Methodist Episcopal Church in Jamaica, Queens, for the past 21 years, he has transformed

FLAKE p. 16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EXCLUSIVE
"Geographical boundaries are not strong enough to keep the problem from coming and following us."
REV. FLOYD FLAKE

photo: George Clowes

Bad Programs Stymie School Choice

by Krista Kafer

A new policy study from the Cato Institute provides policymakers with a practical guide for crafting successful school choice programs—ones that are likely to advance the development of a free market in education and avoid the creation of flawed programs that fail to meet expectations and thus check the public's growing interest in and enthusiasm for choice.

"[B]urdensome regulations may impoverish the existing private school market in terms of diversity, resources, and quality," warns the study's author, H. Lillian Omand, former associate program director of the Children's Scholarship Fund. "If children, present and future, are to receive the maximum benefits of school choice, policies must be carefully crafted to preserve and expand the freedom and independence of private schools."

Last year's Supreme Court decision, *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, which upheld the constitutionality of school vouchers, gives lawmakers great latitude in designing parental choice policies: The flow of public funds to private schools—including religious schools—is constitutional as long as the funds reach the schools "wholly as a result of [a parent's] own genuine and independent private choice." Lawmakers hoping to expand the market of education options and raise

BAD DESIGN p. 9

Amid NCLB Negativism, Bright Spots

by Robert Holland

For the second year in a row, thousands of American schoolchildren are failing to receive the benefits of the limited educational choice to which they are entitled under the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001.

Newspapers from coast to coast have reported the consternation of public educators upon finding their schools had flunked NCLB tests of adequate yearly progress (AYP) and their less-than-enthusiastic efforts to help affected parents exercise their rights to public-school choice or paid private tutoring for their children.

In some instances, press accounts blamed public school administrations for not fully informing low-income parents of their options. In others, reporters noted the right

NCLB p. 4

Unions Crush Philanthropy and Volunteerism

by Lisa Snell

Public school administrators often urge businesses and philanthropists to support the public school system.

But while school officials are willing to accept large gifts that support the current school system, a recent incident in Michigan shows they are much less interested in accepting funds that support the *children* in the system rather than the adults.

Rejecting $200 Million

In October, the Mayor of Detroit and Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm turned away a $200 million gift offered to create 15 small charter high schools in Detroit. Philanthropist Robert Thompson wanted to build the small high schools; he would have charged just $1 a year in rent if the school operators maintained a 90 percent graduation rate.

The governor decided to veto the charter school bill that included Thompson's proposal after Detroit teachers shut down the

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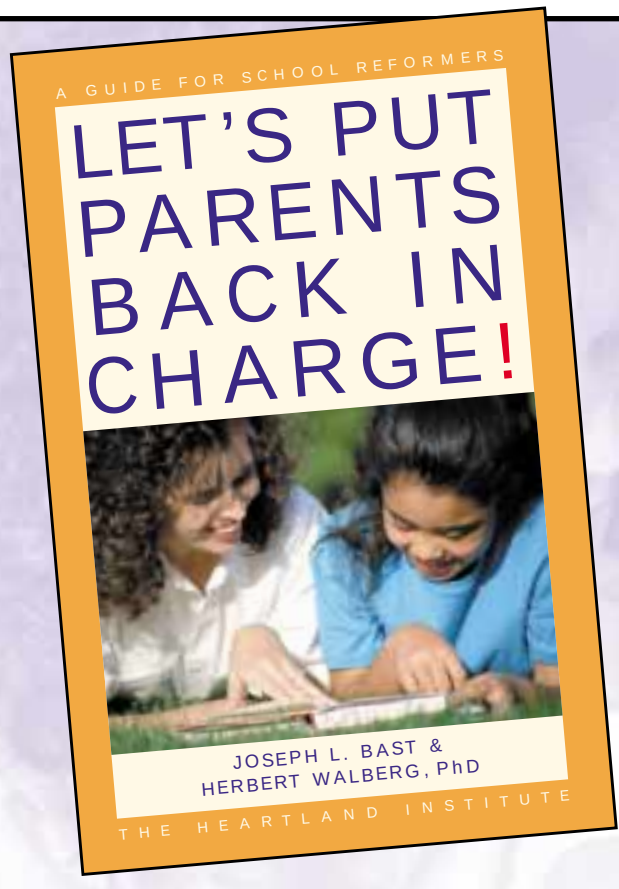

Let's Put Parents Back in Charge!

A GUIDE FOR SCHOOL REFORMERS

by Joseph L. Bast & Herbert J. Walberg, Ph.D.

At its root, the campaign for parental choice in education is about relying on *capitalism* to educate our children. Opponents demonize parental choice in education by tapping the public's confusion about competition, profits, and prices. The anti-choice campaign is really a thinly veiled anti-capitalism campaign. To counter this, we must educate millions of Americans about what capitalism is, how it works, and why it should be trusted in education.

Joseph Bast and Herb Walberg, president and chairman, respectively, of The Heartland Institute, make the case for parental choice in education by explaining and defending capitalism. *Let's Put Parents Back in Charge!* is the first effort to join these two subjects in one book since Milton Friedman proposed vouchers in *Capitalism and Freedom* in 1962.

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School Reform News
EDITORIAL OFFICES

The Heartland Institute

The Heartland Institute
19 South LaSalle Street #903
Chicago, Illinois 60603
312/377-4000 voice • 312/377-5000 fax
e-mail think@heartland.org

School Reform News is available on the Internet. Point your web browser to **http://www.heartland.org**.

PUBLISHER
Joseph L. Bast

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
Nikki Saret

EDITOR
Diane Carol Bast

MANAGING EDITOR
George A. Clowes, Ph.D.

DESIGN AND PRODUCTION
Kevin Fitzgerald, Ross Van Overberghe

ADVERTISING MANAGER
Nikki Saret

CIRCULATION MANAGER
Latreece Vankinscott

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Mike Antonucci, Robert Holland,
Krista Kafer, David Kirkpatrick
Nina Shokraii Rees (on leave)
Paul Seibert, Don Soifer,
Kelly Amis Stewart, Kevin Teasley
Herbert J. Walberg Ph.D., Lee H. Walker

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
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Lee H. Walker, Thomas Walton

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While DC Choice Simmers, NCLB Slow to Settle

by Don Soifer

The fate of President George W. Bush's proposal to bring school choice to District of Columbia parents continued to hang in the balance as this issue went to press in early November. The plan passed by one vote in the House of Representatives this summer, but senate leaders have yet to announce their strategy for bringing it to a vote. Opponents have repeatedly threatened to block the move by filibuster.

Public Information Campaigns

In October, the U.S. Department of Education announced it had awarded $1.3 million to three prominent education reform organizations to advance the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in select cities across the United States.

The Black Alliance for Educational Options, Greater Educational Opportunities Foundation, and Hispanic Council for Reform and Education Options were awarded grants to undertake public information campaigns and grassroots activities about different aspects of NCLB. Raising parents' awareness and understanding of the law's supplemental services and choice provisions will be a primary focus of their efforts. The groups will target their activities in Austin, Camden (New Jersey), Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Gary (Indiana), Milwaukee, Philadelphia, and San Antonio.

Under the NCLB, parents of children whose public schools fail to meet state performance standards are offered a range of educational options. Those include making their child's share of federal Title I funding available for them to use to obtain supplemental services—including tutoring, afterschool services, and summer school programs. Private or faith-based organizations can be eligible providers of those services, once approved by state education departments. Public school choice is another option available to parents under the 2001 law.

The new grants were issued as part of the Fund for the Improvement of Education, which supports nationally significant programs and projects to improve the quality of education.

Uneven Implementation Reported

NCLB implementation was the focus of an October 20 field hearing held by the House Education Committee in Greenville, South Carolina. Lawmakers used the hearing to help determine whether states and school districts were doing an adequate job of providing parents with the information necessary for them to take advantage of the new options.

Testimony indicated the law is being implemented unevenly in school districts across the country. According to Deputy Under Secretary Nina Rees, many states did not have the required test score data available to identify schools in need of improvement in time for the start of the 2002-03 school year. As a result, parents in those states would likely need to wait an entire school year before options such as public school choice are again made available.

Deputy Under Secretary of Education Nina Rees

Chicago Mayor Richard Daley

In some states, potential providers of supplemental services were subjected to unreasonable contractual requirements and prolonged delays in processing applications, Rees said. She noted some school districts made it unduly difficult for parents to sign up to receive the new options.

Law Meets New Criticism

New criticism of NCLB came from various state and local policymakers nationwide. Chicago Mayor Richard Daley and Virginia Governor Mark Warner, both Democrats, were among the most prominent leaders to vent publicly about the law.

Warner in October complained Virginia had been given inadequate federal funding to implement the new law's requirements. According to the federal Department of Education, Virginia's share of federal education funding, $990 million for FY 2003, has increased by more then $220 million since NCLB was signed into law.

Chicago's Daley, in a speech to the Council of Great City Schools, issued his own broad criticism of the law, which he said "confuses parents, stigmatizes schools, creates logistical nightmares, doesn't target all the students who most need help, and is an unfunded mandate."

The mayor's criticism prompted a swift reaction from U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige.

"Unfortunately, [Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley] chooses to focus on how 'tough' this law is for the adults in the system, rather than on how this powerful, bipartisan law will help the children who need it most."

ROD PAIGE
U.S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

"Unfortunately, he chooses to focus on how 'tough' this law is for the adults in the system, rather than on how this powerful, bipartisan law will help the children who need it most," responded Paige. Paige also noted Chicago's Title I funding had increased by 45 percent, to more than $240 million, in the two years since the law was passed.

McPherson Named for Number Three Department Spot

Bush on October 28 announced his intent to nominate Edward McPherson as Under Secretary of Education, the Department's number three position. McPherson has most recently served as chief financial officer at the U.S. Department of Commerce. If confirmed, his role as a principal policy advisor will include budget, strategic planning, and all accountability issues under NCLB.

Don Soifer is executive vice president of the Lexington Institute. His email address is **soifer@lexingtoninstitute.org**.

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Frist and Hastert Urged to Support DC Scholarships

Bill Frist

Dennis Hastert

MANAGING EDITOR'S NOTE:
On October 21, Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform, sent a letter to Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist and Speaker J. Dennis Hastert urging them to support funding for a District of Columbia scholarship program as part of the district's omnibus appropriations bill. The text of that letter is reprinted here. Boldface text was emphasized in the original.

Dear Senate Majority Leader Frist
and Speaker Hastert:

Now that the legislative session is drawing to a close, it appears that Congress will wrap up the final appropriations bills into an omnibus funding package. **I urge you to support funding for a D.C. scholarship program as part of any omnibus appropriations bill that is passed by Congress.**

Schoolchildren in the District of Columbia have been trapped in failing public schools for too long. Authorizing funding for a school choice program will provide low-income parents residing in the District of Columbia with the financial means needed to enroll their children in higher-performing schools in the District of Columbia. In addition, the funds these students receive can also be used to pay for transportation, fees, and tuition costs.

The positive effects of school choice on students and on public schools are apparent in programs around the country. As Harvard University economist Caroline M. Hoxby writes, "An evaluation of Milwaukee suggests that public schools have a strong, positive productivity response to competition from vouchers." According to her study of the Milwaukee school choice program, **those public schools facing the most competition saw math scores rise by 7 percentage points each year**, far better than at schools facing less competition.

Local District of Columbia leaders including Mayor Anthony Williams, Board of Education President Peggy Cooper Cafritz, and City Council Education Committee Chair Kevin Chavous recognize the benefits of increased parental choice, and that is why they support school choice funding for the District of Columbia. They recognize that a solution to D.C.'s education crisis must include competition.

I urge you to include a D.C. scholarship program in the final omnibus appropriations bill.

Sincerely,
Grover Norquist
President, Americans for Tax Reform

NCLB

Continued from page 1

to transfer to a better-performing public school meant little because of the shortage of better-performing public schools and/or those with room to accommodate transfers.

Agreement was widespread as to the toothlessness of the NCLB provision urging systems with failing schools to form partnerships with adjacent school systems allowing students to transfer across district boundaries. Resistance from potential recipient districts—usually located in suburbia—is stout. Washington declined to mandate interdistrict public-school choice; moreover, Congressional Democrats insisted President George W. Bush take the most potent form of choice—private-school vouchers—off the table.

Private Tutoring Option Ignored

Letting parents use a portion of federal Title I aid to purchase private tutoring is potentially the most valuable option presented by NCLB when schools fail to make adequate progress in student math and reading achievement for two years running. But whole-hearted compliance is far from universal.

In New York City, little more than 30,000 of 243,000 eligible students requested free tutoring last year, when it first became available, and the *New York Times* reported signups were running even lower this fall. Tutoring companies and advocates for children blamed school officials for ineffective communication with needy families and unnecessarily tight deadlines for enrollment.

In Chicago, almost nine of every 10 eligible Chicago parents didn't apply for the tutoring and, as the school year began, the city's public school officials were pondering how to spend $20 million in federal money that would have gone to the parents.

"The bureaucracy has bungled this process, and now they are trying to shift the blame to parents," Donald Moore, executive director of Designs for Change, told a *Chicago Sun-Times* education reporter. "The process [was] confusing and discouraging."

Some Bright Spots Appear

Nevertheless, bright spots have appeared in communities where education leaders treated NCLB requirements as an opportunity to help parents rather than a reason to hide from them. And by their example, others may eventually be led.

One was Philadelphia, where schools chief executive officer Paul Vallas was exploring possible cooperative arrangements with Catholic schools that would enable children to transfer from some of the city's low-performing schools.

Vallas, who runs a school system engaged in the nation's largest venture in school privatization, recently asked suburban Philadelphia districts and area Catholic schools if they would be willing to accept some transferring students exercising their NCLB rights. The suburban systems flatly said no, but the Catholic schools were receptive.

"The mandate from the federal government was to seek out and expand school choice options by approaching other districts, both public and private," said Vallas. "The Archdiocese [of Philadelphia] is another school system in the city."

Some creative possibilities under consideration are public school use of parochial facilities during off-hours or exchange programs in which Catholic students could take part in some advanced programs in district schools.

Another example of a can-do attitude came from Nashville, where the principal of Kirkpatrick Elementary School, Kimberly Fowler, and her staff literally went the extra mile when their initial bulletins informing parents of the availability of federally funded tutoring elicited scant response.

A six-page packet that went home resulted in fewer than 3 percent of eligible families signing up. A follow-up notice yielded similarly disappointing results, so Fowler and her staffers went door-to-door to students' homes to personally assist parents in connecting with

USAL Dia

Paul Vallas, CEO of the Philadelphia public school system, has embraced No Child Left Behind with creative proposals for working with suburban and Catholic schools.

tutorial services to help their children catch up. As a result, more than 70 percent of Kirkpatrick's eligible students are being tutored.

Why go to such effort rather than simply grouse about identification under NCLB as a school needing improvement? "My kids are just as smart as everybody else's, but they come into school a little bit behind, so we just need the extra time," Fowler told the *Chicago Tribune*.

Another positive development will come with the launch in January of a Web site that could bridge the NCLB information gap for parents and educators alike. A $50 million public-private partnership will provide free access to disaggregated NCLB test results and other data from each state so that it will be possible to monitor the progress—or lack thereof—of each school and measure it against comparable schools.

The Web site will be the fruit of collaboration among the Broad Foundation, Standard & Poor's School Evaluation Services, the U.S. Department of Education, and Just for the Kids, a Texas-based research group.

Among other things, the database will enable users to judge how far short or how far ahead any school is toward the goal of all children achieving at an acceptable academic standard by 2014. That knowledge could assist parents and educators in making informed decisions on how to enhance students' opportunities to succeed.

Robert Holland is a senior fellow with the Lexington Institute, a public policy think tank in Arlington, Virginia. His email address is **holland@lexingtoninstitute.org**.

INTERNET INFO

Information about the school reform efforts of the Broad Foundation is available online at **http://www.broadfoundation.org/med-news/index-net.shtml**.

Information on the Just for the Kids organization is available from **http://www.just4kids.org/us/us_home.asp**.

The July 2003 report, "RaisingAchievement with No Child Left Behind: S&P Tools for Schools," is available from the Standard & Poor's Web site at **http://www.sp-ses.com/pdf/raising_achievement_sp_tools.pdf**.

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School Choice Continues to Build Global Momentum

by Robert Holland

Recent weeks have brought new evidence of growing support for parental choice in a wide variety of nations.

Last month's issue of *School Reform News* reported gains for choice in China, Taiwan, Thailand, South Africa, Canada, and within the Labor government of Great Britain. (See "School Choice Gathers Momentum Worldwide," *School Reform News*, November 2003.)

Since then, further developments favorable to educational freedom have come in New Zealand, India, and within the Tory opposition party in Britain.

New Zealand Reforms

New Zealand reformed its school system almost two decades ago by giving parents more direct control of their children's education within a government-controlled system. This fall, an influential advocacy group called Education Forum issued a report titled "A New Deal: Making Education Work for All New Zealanders," urging that parents be given "greater freedom to determine what school will best suit their children and, more importantly, backing up that choice with state funding."

Members of a cross-section of Kiwi political parties attended a parliamentary launch of the choice initiative.

Speaking of the political leaders who participated, Education Forum policy advisor Norman LaRocque said, "This doesn't mean that their parties share the exact same vision for education. What it means is that these politicians believe that education is more important than party politics, and are willing to come to the table and discuss their ideas for change."

Endorsing "A New Deal," Early Childhood Council CEO Sue Thorne asserted, "We don't have to look overseas to see that school choice for parents and transferable funding works. The preschool sector in New Zealand has worked like that for years. If a parent isn't happy, they move on to a service that better meets their child's needs, funding follows the child 'within the hour' the parents vote with their feet.

"Now that's parent power! And it makes services so highly responsive to needs that parents don't need to move. It can happen and it should happen for schools. How silly it is that parents can choose an educational facility (and have funding follow the child) up until the age of 5 years, but then they can't."

Vouchers in India?

In India, the president of the Centre for Civil Society, a prominent think tank based in New Delhi, called for introduction of a voucher system that would free parents from sending their children to government schools. The voucher would be equal to the amount the government spends per child and would be payable to the school a parent chose.

According to the Bhopal *Central Chronicle*, Centre President Parth J. Shah explained parents would be free to choose schools with tuition higher than the voucher amount if they paid the difference themselves.

Vouchers, he further argued, would encourage the opening of many new schools. In villages currently lacking schools because parents are too poor to afford an education for their children, vouchers would make it possible to open schools because parents for the first time would have education purchasing power.

British Conservatives Propose Vouchers

Last month, news came from Britain that a newly appointed policy advisor to Prime Minister Tony Blair and his Labor government is a strong supporter of school vouchers.

Now, the opposition Conservative Party has unveiled a voucher proposal that would enable parents to use public grants to send their children to independent schools.

The Tories' shadow education minister, Damian Green, said the school "passports" would "revolutionize" the British educational system in that they would "allow all children to aspire to an excellent education." Vouchers would debut in inner-city London, Birmingham, Manchester, and Liverpool.

"Our scheme will give parents access to new schools, funded by the state but run independently, to meet the needs of those parents who can't find the right school for their children," Green said.

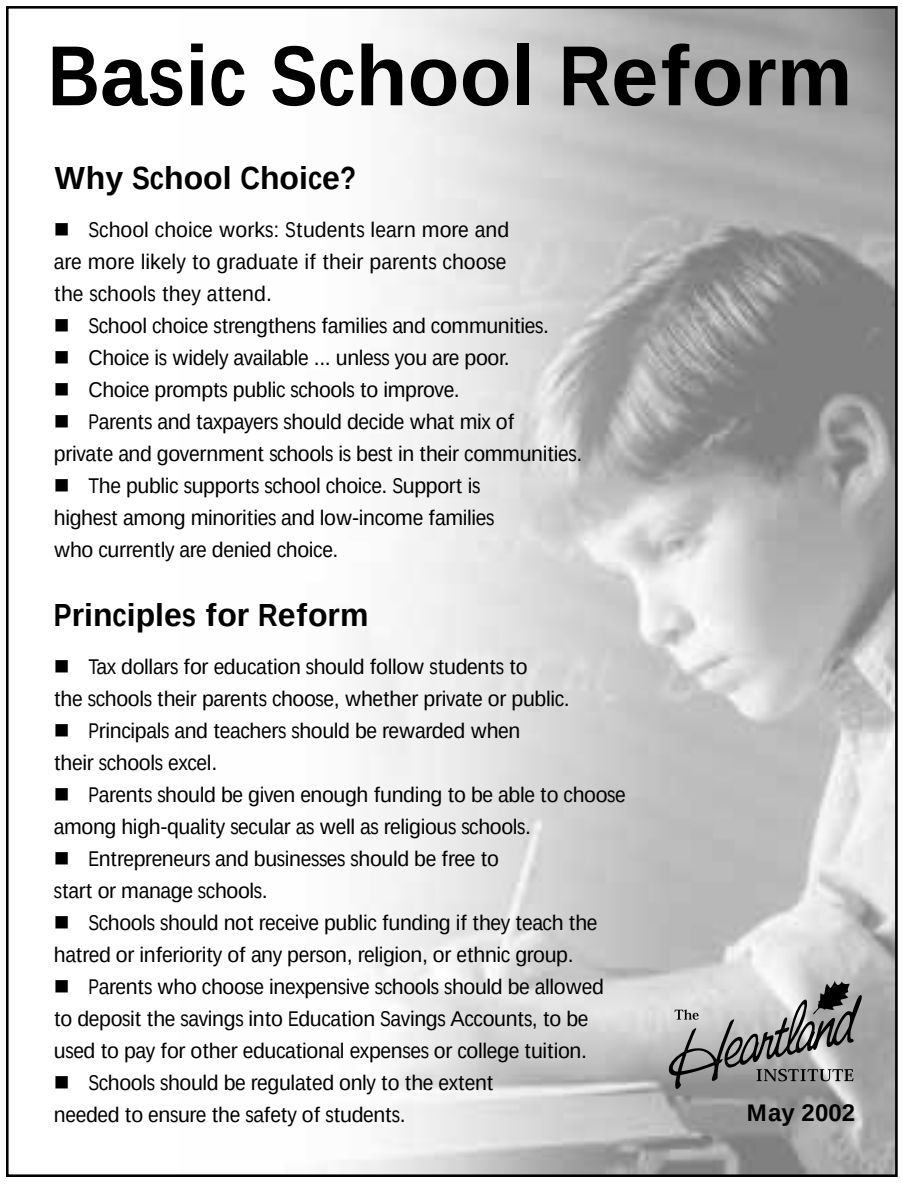
Members of the British education establishment were hostile to the proposal.

"Vouchers have been bitterly divisive in the United States," asserted John Bangs, an official of the National Union of Teachers. "They have damaged successful schools. Parental choice is an illusion and the organization of effective education has been undermined."

Robert Holland is a senior fellow at the Lexington Institute, a public policy think tank located in Arlington, Virginia. His email address is **holland@lexingtoninstitute.org**.

INTERNET INFO

The October 2003 report from the Education Forum, "A New Deal: Making Education Work for All New Zealanders," is available with related materials from the Forum's Web site at **www.educationforum.org.nz/documents/other/a_new_deal.htm**.


Basic School Reform
Why School Choice?
■ School choice works: Students learn more and are more likely to graduate if their parents choose the schools they attend.
■ School choice strengthens families and communities.
■ Choice is widely available ... unless you are poor.
■ Choice prompts public schools to improve.
■ Parents and taxpayers should decide what mix of private and government schools is best in their communities.
■ The public supports school choice. Support is highest among minorities and low-income families who currently are denied choice.
Principles for Reform
■ Tax dollars for education should follow students to the schools their parents choose, whether private or public.
■ Principals and teachers should be rewarded when their schools excel.
■ Parents should be given enough funding to be able to choose among high-quality secular as well as religious schools.
■ Entrepreneurs and businesses should be free to start or manage schools.
■ Schools should not receive public funding if they teach the hatred or inferiority of any person, religion, or ethnic group.
■ Parents who choose inexpensive schools should be allowed to deposit the savings into Education Savings Accounts, to be used to pay for other educational expenses or college tuition.
■ Schools should be regulated only to the extent needed to ensure the safety of students.
The Heartland INSTITUTE
May 2002

District Drops Successful Singapore Math Program

Students in four Maryland schools who were taught using the Singapore Math program significantly outperformed their peers who were not in the program, according to a school system study released in February. The improvement was significant on every one of a variety of assessments and at every grade level at the four schools—some of which were Title I schools, some had high minority populations, and some had low minority populations.

"The results support what we curriculum freaks have insisted all along: Math is math, and if you learn it well, you'll perform well on math tests," Laurie Sekiguchi told Maryland *Gazette* reporter Eric Kelderman. Sekiguchi is a critic of the county's regular mathematics curriculum.

Despite the proven success of the Singapore Math program, the Montgomery County Public Schools system, under Superintendent Jerry Weast, has adopted another curriculum more aligned to state tests. One school already has dropped the Singapore Math curriculum and two more will drop it at the end of this year, leaving only one of the four schools—the most successful—to continue with the program.

The new curriculum is "pure fuzzy math," according to John Hoven, another critic of the district's regular math program. Hoven is co-president of the Gifted and Talented Association of Montgomery County, Maryland and has been working since 1991 to convince schools to make curriculum changes and raise academic standards.

When U.S. students performed poorly in mathematics in the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) in 1995 and 1999, the typical U.S. math curriculum was criticized for being too broad and too shallow. Since students from Singapore had taken top billing in the TIMSS math section, interest developed in the math curriculum used in Singapore, which emphasizes mastery of basic math facts before moving on to theory.

—G.C.

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Decentralizing Hawaii's Public School System

by Laura Brown

Hawaii's current education system is highly centralized, despite the dispersed geographic nature of a multi-island state and the unique needs of individual communities.

Hawaii's single-district system uses a funding methodology called the Enrollment Ratio Formula (ERF). Amounts are allotted to schools based on enrollment and student types, which correlates into numbers of staff, such as teachers, paraprofessionals, and librarians. ERF restricts a principal's control over funds and limits decision-making on number and type of staff, money spent for teacher training, books, and curriculum.

As a comparison, the Houston Independent School District is very similar to Hawaii's Department of Education. Houston has 288 schools, 208,672 students, and a $1.16 billion budget, resulting in a per-pupil expenditure of $5,558. Hawaii's public school system has 261 schools, 180,000 students, and a $1.5 billion budget, resulting in a per-pupil expenditure of $8,333.

Hawaii appropriates staff rather than dollars under ERF, while Houston employs a Weighted Student Formula (WSF), which allows funds to flow directly to individual schools. Houston principals control 58.6 percent of their budget, while Hawaii principals control only 4 percent of theirs.

Under the WSF system, which is used by Edmonton and Seattle as well as Houston, money goes directly to benefit individual schools. Funds are "block granted" to each school on a per-student allocation basis and weighted to reflect the number of "categorical" funds for which students qualify. Students may choose any school they like within the district, and the funding follows the child.

If Hawaii adopted that organizational model, the statewide agency would monitor local agencies, a factor now missing in Hawaii's centralized system. Rather than relying on Inspector Generals and surveillance staff in a top-down model, decentralized districts use an "exceptions" approach, comparing current outcomes with past performance and intervening only when problems arise.

Under WSF, principals would become the CEOs of their schools. Budgetary autonomy at the school level would result in an increased number of employees reporting directly to the individual school principal instead of a central office.

Under the WSF system, parents would choose where their student attends school. Funding attached to the individual student would give parents the leverage needed to demand quality performance. If an individual school does not provide customer satisfaction, the consumer can shop for a better service provider.

Laura Brown is education researcher and writer with Hawaii Reporter.com. Her email address is **laurabrown@hawaii.rr.com**.

INTERNET INFO

A fuller discussion of the issues involved in decentralizing Hawaii's public education system is provided in the June 2003 article, "Making Public Schools Work," by Laura Brown in Issue #5 of *In Pursuit of...* from the Grassroot Institute of Hawaii, online at **http://www.grassrootinstitute.org/publications/index.htm**.

Unions

Continued from page 1

city's schools with a one-day walkout on September 25. More than 3,000 teachers held a demonstration at the state capitol.

Despite the hundreds of students attending low-performing high schools in Detroit, the bottom line for the city's teacher union was that more charter schools would mean less money for the district.

"Every time a kid leaves the Detroit system that's $7,000 walking out the door," Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick told the *Detroit News*.

After withdrawing his gift Thompson expressed his disappointment in a public statement.

"I am disappointed and saddened by the anger and hostility that has greeted our proposal. Because of these contentious conditions, we are not going to move forward with our planned charter high schools," said Thompson. "Our proposal to build a number of new very small charter high schools in Detroit was intended to increase options for Detroit parents and children. The proposal was meant to be for kids and not against anyone or any institution."

Jack McHugh, a legislative analyst with the Michigan-based Mackinac Center for Public Policy, denounced the decision as a blow for Detroit children stuck in failing schools.

"By their actions, the defenders of this failed school system could not have made their scale of priorities more clear," he said. "Very low on that scale are the future prospects and current well being of the children forced to attend this school district, which is a tragic monument to failure and hopelessness."

Union Rebukes Parent Volunteers

On a smaller scale but with a similar attitude, San Diego union members recently rebuked parent volunteers who were working to clean up a local elementary school.

At Marvin Elementary School in San Diego, California parents volunteered to help clean up the school campus after it had been neglected due to school district employee layoffs. Landscaping had become overgrown at many San Diego campuses, and parents offered to pull weeds and remove trash from the campus.

But the San Diego school unions cried foul, claiming such acts of volunteerism violate union labor laws. The union representing landscapers said schools are prohibited from giving district work to anyone but employees.

"People intend to have a community cleanup, but it is very dangerous for schools to rely on this work," union president Eric Olson explained in the *San Diego Tribune*. "What happens when the district gets in better financial shape—why rehire the landscape crews when the work is being done free? If people really want to help, they should be writing their elected officials about the budget."

The district even circulated a memo telling administrators what to do in the event this "problem" of volunteers arose. Now the principal of one school says she was wrong to ask for volunteers.

Marvin Elementary Principal E. Jay Derwae is one of the few sticking up for the volunteers.

"Our nondistrict school foundation decided it wanted to spruce up the school because of budget cuts and because the weeds were five feet tall," said Derwae. "The union told us we were to cease and desist. But I'm not going to tell my parents and neighbors who live in houses with impeccable yards they can't clean up the school."

Volunteer Work Prohibited at Schools

Union collective bargaining laws across the nation prohibit volunteers from doing work employees usually perform. San Diego is not the only school district to claim volunteers violated union rules.

Perhaps the most notorious example happened in 2002, when two Brooklyn school janitors demanded to be paid time-and-a-half—$37 an hour—for two weekends when community members worked on school landscaping as a memorial in honor of a second-grade boy who had recently died.

The janitors did not even participate in the work. The grieving community members had violated their labor contract.

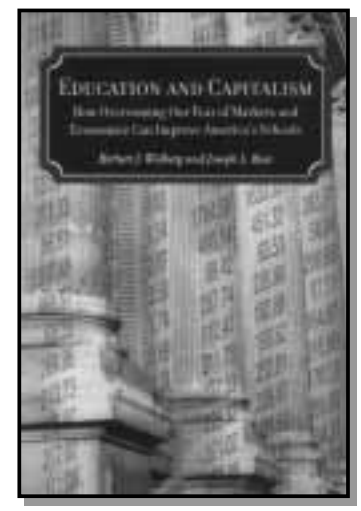
The unions argue some types of volunteerism violate the bargaining agreement that prohibits schools from giving district work to anyone but employees. But by this logic, the very spirit of philanthropy and volunteerism violates union rules.

Volunteers and philanthropists serve a critical school function, allowing parents and the community to be engaged in their schools while allowing principals and school superintendents to conserve resources and acquire new resources that can be focused on the classroom and improving student performance.

Lisa Snell is director of the education program for the Reason Foundation in Los Angeles. Her email address is **lsnell@reason.org**.

Education & Capitalism

How Overcoming Our Fear of Markets and Economics Can Improve America's Schools



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When Principals Can Be Entrepreneurs, Schools Improve

Decentralization offers politically feasible reform model

by Lisa Snell

If principals were put in charge of their individual schools and allowed to run them as small businesses, is it likely the schools would be more successful than if the schools and their resources were directed by a central office?

"[T]he decentralized public school districts and Catholic schools had significantly less fraud, less centralized bureaucracy and staff, more money at the classroom level, and higher student achievement."

After studying a variety of public and Catholic school systems in North America, UCLA Professor of Management William G. Ouchi concludes in a new book that decentralized school systems run more efficiently and produce better student achievement.

In *Making Schools Work: A Revolutionary Plan to Get Your Children the Education They Need* (Simon & Schuster, 2003; ISBN: 0743246306; 284 pages, $25), Ouchi and a team of 12 researchers set out to test the following premise: School districts are more successful when they are managed in a way that allows principals to be entrepreneurs, "managers who take the initiative rather than taking orders."

Ouchi included three types of large North American school systems in his research sample:

- Three very centralized public school districts: New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago;
- Three very decentralized public school districts: Seattle, Houston, and Edmonton, Canada; and,
- Three very decentralized Catholic school districts: Chicago, New York City, and Los Angeles.

Ouchi's research team visited 223 schools, representing at least 5 percent of the schools in each system. In each system the team gathered data about student performance, school centralization, and the amount of money that reaches the classroom. The team focused on the school budgets, the accountability systems, and the achievement of students.

What they found was that how a school is managed matters. Schools perform better on fiscal and academic outcomes when there is a) local control of school budgets by principals, and b) open enrollment, which allows the per-pupil funding to follow the child.

Overall, the decentralized public school districts and Catholic schools had significantly less fraud, less centralized bureaucracy and staff, more money at the classroom level, and higher student achievement.

The decentralized public school districts used an innovative financing mechanism called the Weighted Student Formula, pioneered by Edmonton school superintendent Michael Strembitsky. The formula attaches school funding to the backs of children and in so doing gives budgetary control to each school principal.

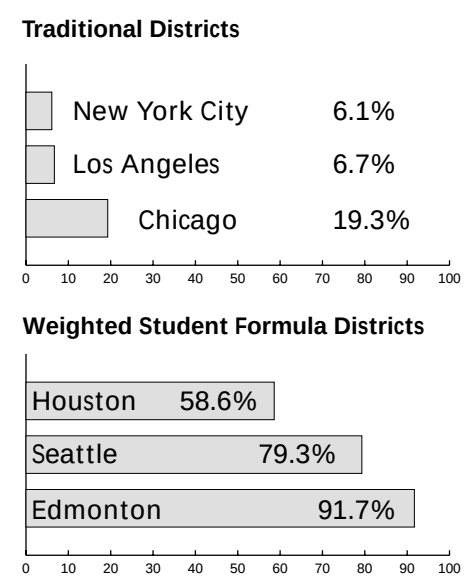
For example, in the Seattle system, students are assigned "weights" for supplementary funds for categories such as poverty, limited English proficiency, and special education. The weighting scheme is simple and described on one page in the Seattle district's budget book. Each child is worth a weight of between 1 and 9.2 depending on the needs of the individual child.

Each school is funded by a basic operating grant from the district plus the weighted funds brought in by each individual child enrolled at the school. The Weighted Student Formula allows individual schools to compete for students and allows principals to control their budgets and tailor their schools to the needs of their specific school populations.

After the introduction of the Weighted Student Formula in Seattle, all principals attended management training programs to prepare them to be CEOs of their schools, with full responsibility for staffing, budgets, scheduling, and marketing.

Ouchi also examined the percentage of a school budget under a principal's local control in traditional versus Weighted Student Formula districts:

Percentage of School Budget Under Principal's Control


Traditional Districts
New York City 6.1%
Los Angeles 6.7%
Chicago 19.3%
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100
Weighted Student Formula Districts
Houston 58.6%
Seattle 79.3%
Edmonton 91.7%
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Overall, *Making Schools Work* offers a compelling model for restructuring school finance, giving principals true control over their schools and offering real public school choice to all students. The book carefully details how this school revolution is playing out in Seattle, Houston, and Edmonton, with many informative stories and solid evidence that local control leads to school success.

Ouchi finds that the three Catholic school systems he examined—Chicago, New York City, and Los Angeles—are the most decentralized. They have very small central staffs, spend the least money per-pupil, and have the highest student achievement.

"Regardless of how local control is packaged, says Ouchi, 'unless and until control gets all the way down to the individual local schools—and the money, too, goes to the schools—nothing will be different.'"

Those observations lead to the one real criticism of the book: One might question whether it is really necessary to stay within the bounds of the existing public school system and complete the difficult task of change from within the system through a Weighted Student Formula. The alternative would be to move to a direct financing mechanism through vouchers, tax credits, or even charter schools—where per-pupil funding immediately empowers parents and leads to the most decentralized schools of all, with 100 percent local budget control.

The answer might be that Ouchi's decentralization model presents a politically feasible interim alternative to traditional public school management that has real traction plus examples of successful implementation in Seattle, Houston, and Edmonton. It is also complementary to the No Child Left Behind Act and may be a school district's best hope to comply with the student achievement and public school choice components of the federal law.

The strongest point made in *Making Schools Work* is that most school districts merely give word play to local control and site-based management. That kind of "local control" is fraudulent. According to Ouchi, the bottom line is that the money must follow the child. The only true local control occurs when the school principal controls the school budget.

Regardless of how local control is packaged, says Ouchi, "unless and until control gets all the way down to the individual local schools—and the money, too, goes to the schools—nothing will be different."

Lisa Snell is director of the education program for the Reason Foundation in Los Angeles. Her email address is **lsnell@reason.org**.

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Bad Design

Continued from page 1

the quality of existing options must weigh the costs and benefits of specific proposals.

Omand's policy study, "The Struggle for School Choice Policy after *Zelman*: Regulation vs. the Free Market," examines various school choice models and uses results from a national survey of private schools to show how state regulation of schools inhibits the market and the success of such programs.

Based on the survey responses and an analysis of existing programs, Omand also offers a set of principles for enacting choice programs that will foster a robust market and provide the greatest numbers of options for families. Lawmakers are encouraged to follow these guidelines when crafting new choice legislation:

- Make choice universal and not limited by income eligibility.
- Pose few barriers to school participation and enact safeguards to prevent future legislation from doing so.
- Target policies to families who switch from public to private and phase in current private school users over time.
- Set a voucher/tax credit amount according to the cost of non-subsidized schools. Do not cap the amount the school can charge. Price caps limit school participation and reduce the market responsiveness that occurs when parents are responsible for a portion of the cost.
- Reduce the use of third-party payers—taxpayers or charities—by enacting tax credits parents can use against income and property taxes.

Existing Programs

Eleven states currently have tax credit or voucher programs.

- Three states (Illinois, Iowa, and Minnesota) offer tax credits or deductions to parents who use private schools.
- Three states (Arizona, Florida, and Pennsylvania) offer individuals or corporations tax credits for donations to scholarship organizations that pay tuition on behalf of poor students.
- Six states (Colorado, Florida, Maine, Ohio, Vermont, and Wisconsin) have voucher or voucher-like programs.

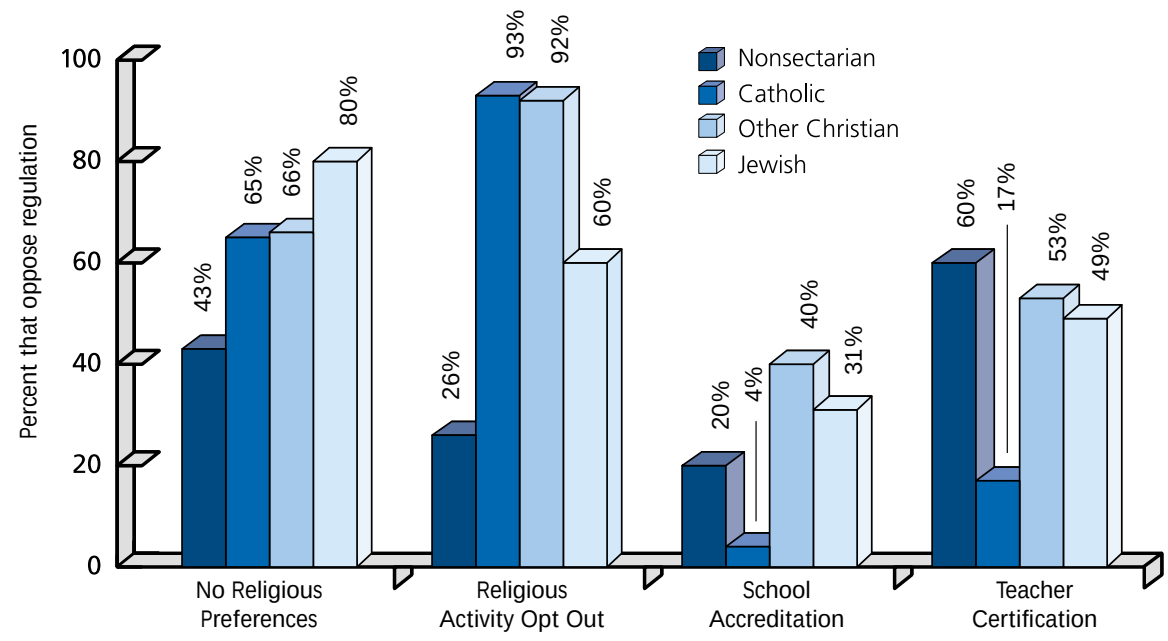
With the exception of the programs in Maine and Vermont, which apply to rural areas, existing voucher programs are limited to poor or disabled students or to students in low-performing schools. Universal vouchers have been proposed but have not yet been enacted.

While supporters of school choice have in the past focused most of their effort on establishing the constitutionality of school choice and influencing public opinion, Omand argues attention must now be focused on the effects of the programs. She points out the potential for increasing the quality and diversity of the private school market depends on the number of students and schools that participate. However, restrictions on student eligibility, voucher amounts, and private school eligibility constrain the number of participating students and schools, thereby limiting competition and the positive impact of the programs.

For example, poverty thresholds and rules that limit programs to a particular locality limit the number of students who may participate. Regulations and the amount of the voucher limit the number of schools willing to enroll students. Under programs with a low voucher value, only subsidized religious schools—primarily Catholic—are likely to participate.

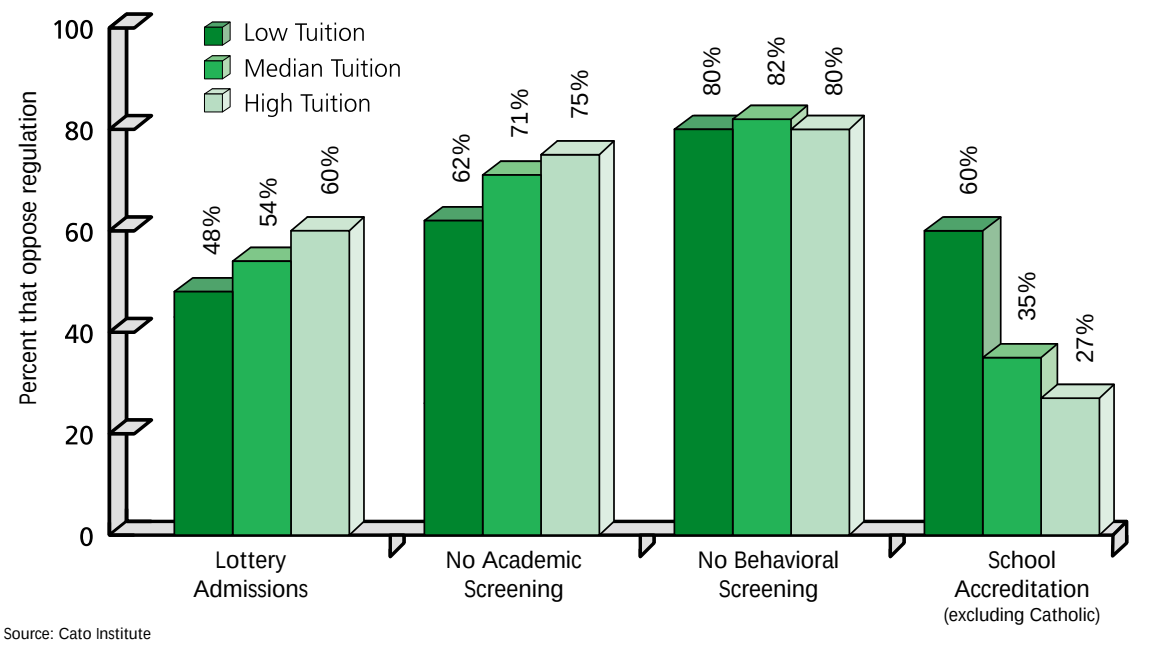
Regulation of private schools is also likely to reduce participation. The study identifies several regulations common to existing and proposed programs. Such rules include forbidding schools from having admission preferences, not permitting tuition charges beyond the amount of the voucher, and requirements for accreditation, teacher qualifications, and standardized testing.

Opposition to Regulation by Religious Affiliation



Source: Cato Institute

Opposition to Regulation by Tuition Category



Source: Cato Institute

Private School Survey

To gauge how these regulations would affect private school participation, the author surveyed 5,573 private schools across the country, asking them also for their reaction to a voucher capped at half the per-pupil spending in the local public schools. One thousand of the schools responded. Among the survey findings:

- Opposition to tuition caps is correlated to the tuition rate of the school. Schools with more expensive tuitions oppose rules that prevent them from charging extra tuition beyond the cost of the proposed voucher.
- Christian schools oppose policies that forbid them from giving admission preferences to members of their denomination and strongly oppose regulations that allow students to opt out of religious activities.
- Few schools oppose a prohibition on the teaching of "hatred" of any person or group on the basis of ethnicity, race, national origin, or religion.
- Most schools want to be able to screen children for admission on the basis of behavioral problems.
- Opposition to using the state test depended on the state where the school was located. Some state tests were clearly unpopular. There was little opposition by schools in states using the Stanford 9 test.
- The majority of private school principals (82 percent) support vouchers. Only 3 percent oppose tax credits for parents and .5 percent oppose scholarship tax credits.

These responses suggest a high degree of regulation would limit the number of existing schools willing to participate in school choice programs and inhibit the creation of new schools. Omand recommends new choice programs erect as few barriers to participation as possible, and she provides a set of design dos and don'ts for lawmakers to follow in crafting new choice legislation.

Krista Kafer is senior policy analyst for education at The Heritage Foundation. Her email address is **krista.kafer@heritage.org**.

INTERNET INFO

For more information, H. Lillian Omand's October 29, 2003, *Policy Analysis* for the Cato Institute, "The Struggle for School Choice Policy after *Zelman*: Regulation vs. the Free Market," is available online at Cato's Web site at **http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa495.pdf**.

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The Friedman Report

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DC Parents for School Choice: One Step Closer to a Vision

An interview with Virginia Walden Ford

by Laura J. Swartley

Virginia Walden Ford's energetic yet assured and level leadership has been central to the progress achieved by voucher advocates in the District of Columbia. Her group, DC Parents for School Choice, strives to bring choice and innovation to one of the most blighted school districts in the country.

Virginia Walden-Ford

What makes the District of Columbia such a powerful symbol in the struggle to expand parental choice is the irony of having such a district in the backyard of some of the most powerful people in the country. The plight of DC schoolchildren is what drives Walden Ford.

During the past several months, a pilot voucher program for the District has gained national attention, passing several key hurdles and gaining non-traditional support from such District leaders as Mayor Anthony Williams and Board President Peggy Cooper Cafritz. Shortly after the program passed the House of Representatives by a single vote, Walden Ford spoke with Friedman Foundation Communications Director Laura Swartley.

Swartley: *What have the past several months been like, working towards school choice in the District?*

Ford: It has been exciting and very busy working with the parents, helping them learn about getting their voices heard by Congress, and seeing the empowerment of those parents who have not had the opportunity to voice their concerns before. It has been incredibly rewarding and emotionally difficult and physically challenging—but worth every moment that I've been able to serve the parents of the District in their effort to get the education they deserve for their children.

The parents have become more and more "fired up" as each battle has been won through committees. They were truly excited when the program passed the House, and they've become more confident and more willing to speak out and tell their stories.

There have been many shining moments. For example, hearing mothers who have never spoken publicly talk to Congressmen about how they feel about the education of their children; getting the support of Mayor Williams, Councilman Chavous, and Mrs. Cafritz; feeling the parents' joy at each battle won in committees; and watching their faces when we won finally in the House.

My most distressing moment was being in the Gallery when the House voted. The mothers held hands and prayed. It was quite a moment at the end when we won, but it was truly stressful.

I think this program will be the beginning of an education system that will serve all children and not just those with money or the ability to move to neighborhoods that have the better schools. This will create happy and more involved parents and happy and better educated children, children who will have a bright future.

Swartley: *What are you doing to prepare for the vote in the Senate, and afterwards?*

Ford: We've been spending our days going out into the communities of the District. We're talking to parents about what's going on and encouraging them to go to the Hill and talk to Senators and tell how they feel and what this means to them. We've also continued the work we've always done—listening to the pleas of parents and helping them understand what is currently available to them and how they can take advantage of those opportunities.

After a successful Senate vote, the next obstacles are not losing focus as we continue to work diligently to improve all education for all children. We know that the opposition will work hard to undermine any steps we have taken. We have to continue to work hard in our advocacy and not take for granted that we are done. We must not stop fighting until every child is in an environment where they are receiving the best education possible.

My heart is in the District of Columbia with the families I love. I will continue to work on their behalf to make sure that they are informed of every aspect of the program and that the program serves them in the way it is designed. I am an advocate of the parents of Washington, DC and I plan on continuing to do so.

I don't want to think the program won't pass, but if it does not, I will continue to do everything I can to ensure that the education system currently serving our children improves and that the planned reforms are carried out in a timely fashion. I will not rest until that happens. I promised the parents I serve that I would be there with them until we have an educational environment that best meets the needs of their children.

Laura J. Swartley is former communications director for the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation in Indianapolis, Indiana.

School Choice Roundup

by George A. Clowes

CALIFORNIA

Teacher Union Gives Dean Early Endorsement

With eight other Democratic candidates still in the race and the Presidential election still more than a year away, the California Teachers Association (CTA) on October 28 took what CTA president Barbara E. Kerr called a "very rare" move and endorsed Democratic Presidential candidate Howard Dean. The CTA represents 335,000 teachers in California and is a member of the National Education Association, which has 2.7 million members nationwide.

"I don't remember us ever endorsing in a primary," Kerr told the *San Jose Mercury News*. However, Dean shares many of the union's views on education policy, including its strong opposition to school vouchers.

"Taking public money and putting it into private schools is a big mistake," Dean declared during a recent fundraising visit to San Jose. "You're going to get white folks in one school and black folks in another."

San Jose Mercury News
October 29, 2003

COLORADO

Don't Restrict Voucher Choices, Says Newspaper

"[P]art of the purpose of voucher schools is to provide an array of choices that are not necessarily embraced by everyone," the *Rocky Mountain News* reminded its readers—including school board members—in a recent editorial. The newspaper was responding to the reasons given by a number of Colorado school districts for rejecting the applications of private schools to participate in the state's new school voucher program.

For example, the Adams School District 50 in Westminster has rejected all schools operated by the Catholic Archdiocese of Denver because of possible limitations on admission of students with special needs. But schools should be judged by the effort they make to accommodate disabilities relative to their size, argued the newspaper. "[I]nability to afford extremely expensive services is not discrimination, and it should not be regarded as grounds for disqualification." stated the editorial.

The newspaper also pointed out to the Denver and Jefferson County school districts that disapproval of homosexual behavior is not the same as teaching "hatred" of a group, as these districts maintained in rejecting the application of Lakewood's Silver State Baptist School. The private school's policy is derived from its religious beliefs.

"We recall that the U.S. Supreme Court said last year that schools could not be excluded from a voucher program on religious grounds as long as they were freely chosen by parents for their children," noted the newspaper. "In other words, we deplore Silver State Baptist's policy while defending the school's right to set it."

Rocky Mountain News
October 25, 2003

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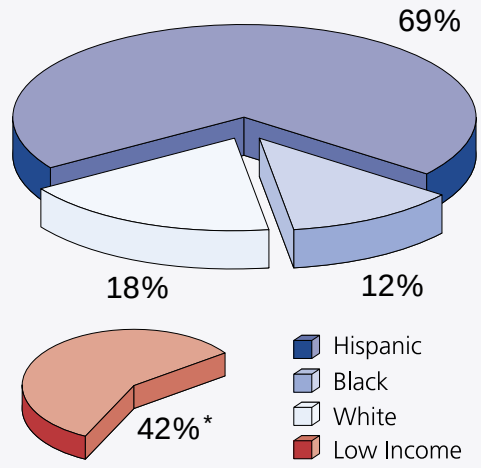
124 Private Schools Apply for Voucher Program

By the October 1 deadline, a total of 442 applications were received from 124 private schools seeking to participate in Colorado's school voucher plan, which will be implemented in 11 districts in the fall of 2004. With the school choice plan requiring the 11 districts to provide vouchers for up to 1 percent of school enrollment, an estimated 3,323 students could be eligible to use the vouchers. The 124 private schools have 3,424 slots available for new students, according to a Denver Post analysis of voucher school applications.

While some 60 percent of Colorado's private schools have a religious affiliation, 72 percent of the 124 private schools applying for the voucher program are religiously affiliated. Forty-seven percent are Catholic, 36 percent Christian, and 12 percent Lutheran.

Denver Post
October 28, 2003

Student Body at Miami Beach High
% of student body



*Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch
Source: National Center for Education Statistics
http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/

FLORIDA

Mayor: Failure of Public School System Prompts Calls for Choice

Before the Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) spends another $6 billion in capital expenditures, Surfside Mayor Paul Novack wants to see how the district spent its last $6 billion.

At an ad hoc meeting of Southeast Florida mayors and community leaders on September 15, Novack repeated his call for an independent forensic audit of MDCPS, citing examples of financial mismanagement in the district, defectively built schools, broken promises on building new and renovating old schools, and bureaucratic resistance to change. In his view, calls for charter schools and school vouchers were occurring only because of the failure of the public school system.

"I think what we were saying is that parents and taxpayers are fed up with the status of the school system and we are interested in looking at alternatives," he told the *Sun-Post*. His favored alternative is to split the district into three or four smaller districts, with Surfside being part of a nine-city district. He dismissed as "absurd" the concerns of critics who said such a move would defeat integration efforts in South Florida.

"The day you could say that Miami Beach High was all white and rich is over—we're as diverse as anyone," he said.

Aventura city commissioner Bob Diamond said his city was in desperate need of additional schools.

"Today, kids in the Caribbean are getting better educations" than in MDCPS, he said, calling the county system "a failure."

Sun-Post
October 30, 2003

Newspaper: Don't Regulate Tax Credit to Death

Noting that several South Florida newspapers were calling for much more "accountability" for the state's corporate tax credit scholarship program—i.e., more rules for corporate participants, more regulations for private school participants, and state tests for student participants—the *Florida Times-Union* took a decidedly different view in an October 1 editorial: "[I]mposing costly, unnecessary regulations on private schools and corporate benefactors would only be an incentive for private schools to give up on the program, which allows corporations a credit for state taxes when they give scholarships to low-income children."

The editorial pointed out that while some 16,000 low-income children had benefitted from the $50 million program last year, state taxpayers also had been major beneficiaries. The Collins Center estimated savings of $606 million over 10 years, and Florida TaxWatch calculated capital savings of $228 million this year alone.

Florida Times-Union
October 1, 2003

GEORGIA

Perdue Proposal Would Rid State of Blaine Amendment

Although Georgia provides a wide range of government-funded services through churches and other religious organizations, its state constitution contains a "Blaine Amendment" prohibiting any "direct or indirect" use of taxpayer money to benefit any "church, sect, cult, or religious denomination."

To clear up this uncertain legal situation, Governor Sonny Perdue recently proposed to "re-align" the state constitution with federal restrictions by adding the following clarification: "except as permitted or required by the United States Constitution, as amended."

"I believe if the First Amendment is good enough for the U.S. Constitution, it's good enough for the Georgia Constitution," Perdue told a group of North Fulton business leaders on October 7, saying the change was needed so that faith-based institutions could fulfill their missions.

Adoption of a Constitutional amendment would require the approval of two-thirds of both state chambers plus approval by voters in a statewide referendum, which in this case is scheduled for November 2004. While aides to the governor believe the measure can pass the legislature this winter, it is likely to face opposition from teacher groups because it would remove the key remaining legal obstacle to school vouchers.

"If it's for vouchers, I would be against it," Senate Minority Leader Michael Meyer Von Bremen (D-Albany) told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

Atlanta Journal-Constitution
October 8, 2003

MINNESOTA

Coleman Backs Vouchers for DC

As mayor of St. Paul in 1996, Norm Coleman was the sole elected official standing up in support of an experimental voucher program for the city's schools. Now, as U.S. Senator for Minnesota, he is supporting the efforts of another mayor, Anthony Williams, to bring an experimental voucher program to his city, Washington, DC.

"I'm not going to push for vouchers for Minnesota kids," Coleman told the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*. "I'm not going to push for a national program. But I will certainly support the local mayor in his effort to provide greater opportunity for his kids."

Minneapolis Star-Tribune
October 13, 2003

Senate Approves Expansion of Milwaukee Voucher Program

On October 22, the Wisconsin Senate approved a measure to eliminate the enrollment cap placed on the Milwaukee voucher program, which limits participants to 15 percent of the enrollment in the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), or about 15,000 students. The program currently enrolls about 12,950 students in 107 schools, with the state paying 55 percent of the cost of the voucher and MPS picking up 45 percent.

The following day, the Senate approved a further expansion of the voucher program to permit the participation of private schools throughout Milwaukee County, not just within the city. In addition, a bill was approved to permit students to remain in the program even if their parents' income reached 220 percent—up from the current level of 175 percent—of the federal poverty level. The bills now go to Governor Jim Doyle for signature or veto.

Many Milwaukee Democrats fought the changes to the voucher program, arguing that Republican expansion advocates from the suburbs did not understand urban education issues.

"I don't need to be patronized to about how all of you from up north are trying to look after African-American kids in my district," said Sen. Gwendolynne Moore (D-Milwaukee).

"I don't think it's fair that we're being told we're being patronizing when we engage in the debate," retorted Sen. Scott Fitzgerald (R-Juneau). He pointed out that school choice was having an effect statewide and nationwide.

Milwaukee Freeman Newspapers
October 24, 2003

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Homework Burden Not So Crushing After All

Less than one hour a day leaves plenty of time for TV

by George A. Clowes

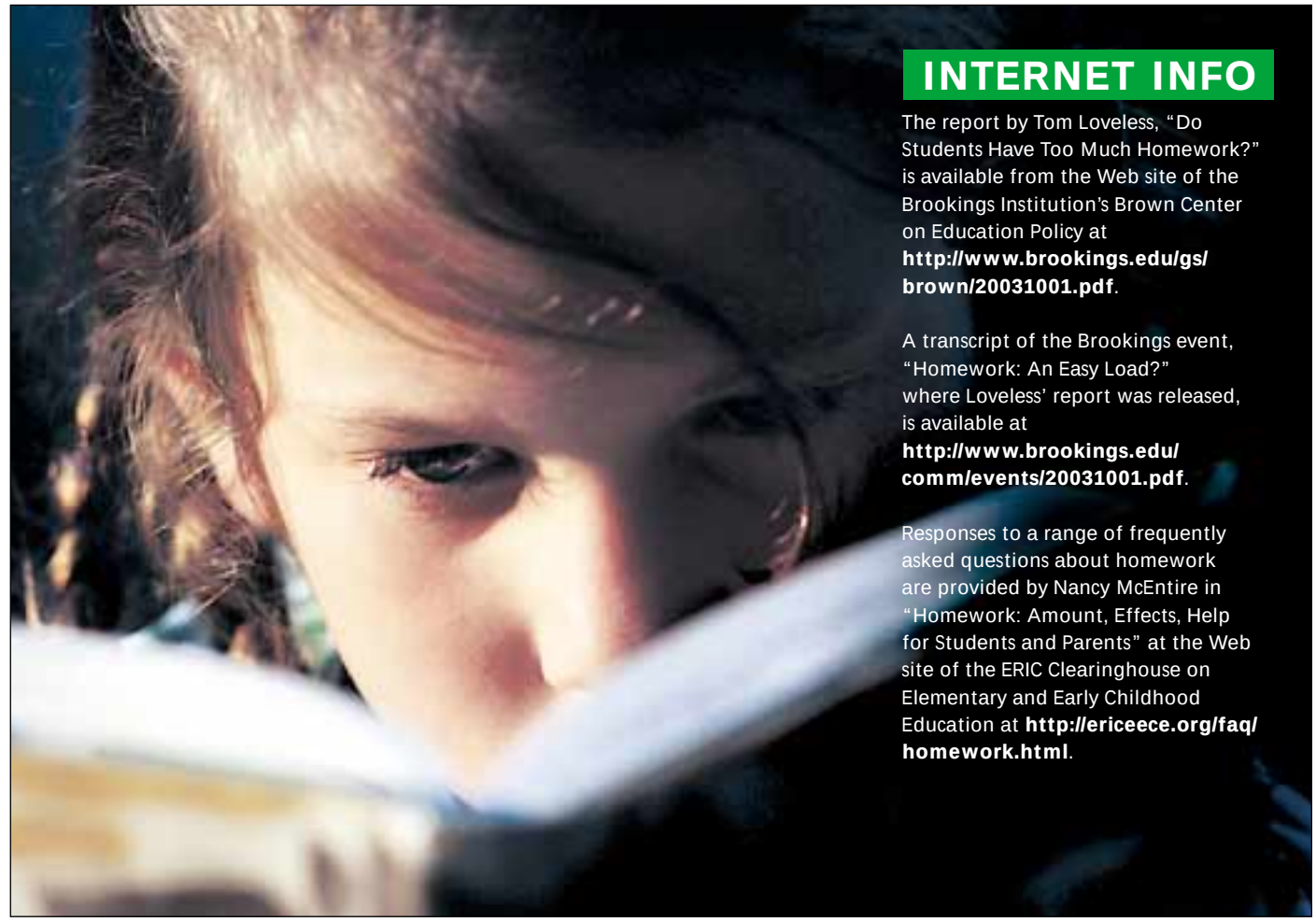
A new study on homework helps clear up a nagging incongruity about U.S. public education: American students are widely reported as being overwhelmed by homework, and yet, despite all that after-school effort, they still perform poorly in ongoing national assessments and in international studies.

The new analysis reveals that, far from being overloaded with homework, American students actually do very little homework at all.

"If there is a backbreaking homework load, it's not showing up," said study author Tom Loveless, director of the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution. On average, students spend less than one hour a day on homework, according to Loveless' new report, released by the Brown Center on October 1.

"The thirteen and a half hours that children continue to devote to television each week is more than six times the amount of time spent studying," notes the report, titled "Do Students Have Too Much Homework?"

Loveless was prompted to conduct his study after reading several reports in the popular media about how children were being inundated with vast amounts of homework and how this homework burden had increased dramatically in recent years. "Homework Hours Tripled Since 1980," stated a 2001 Associated Press headline. "Too Much Homework!" declared *Time*. "Four Hours of Homework for a Third Grader?" asked *People*. "Homework Doesn't Help," said *Newsweek*.



According to a new Brookings Institution report, students in the United States spend, on average, six times as many hours every week watching television as they do on homework.

INTERNET INFO

The report by Tom Loveless, "Do Students Have Too Much Homework?" is available from the Web site of the Brookings Institution's Brown Center on Education Policy at **http://www.brookings.edu/gs/brown/20031001.pdf**.

A transcript of the Brookings event, "Homework: An Easy Load?" where Loveless' report was released, is available at **http://www.brookings.edu/comm/events/20031001.pdf**.

Responses to a range of frequently asked questions about homework are provided by Nancy McEntire in "Homework: Amount, Effects, Help for Students and Parents" at the Web site of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education at **http://ericeece.org/faq/homework.html**.

Importance of Homework

Although researchers haven't shown definitively that doing English, math, science, and social studies homework results in higher academic achievement, the acceptance of a positive relationship between practice and improved performance is a well-established operating principle in athletics, sports, and music.

Practicing newly acquired academic skills is a key step in the learning process, according to University of Illinois education psychologist Barak Rosenshine, who has conducted extensive research on the mechanism of learning. After teachers have introduced a new skill to their students and then guided them through their initial practice sessions, assigned homework provides an additional opportunity for students to practice the new skill until they become experts at it.

"The aim is to have students connect the new material to previous material and to practice until they become fluent," Rosenshine told *School Reform News* in a 2002 interview. (See "What Characterizes an Effective Teacher?" *School Reform News*, May 2002.) Education, he said, "involves starting with a novice and helping the novice become an expert who has strong, readily accessible background knowledge."

PTA Guidelines

PTA guidelines for homework call for 10 minutes per grade per night. Thus, first grade should merit 10 minutes of homework per night, second grade should merit 20 minutes, and so on up to 120 minutes per night in 12th grade.

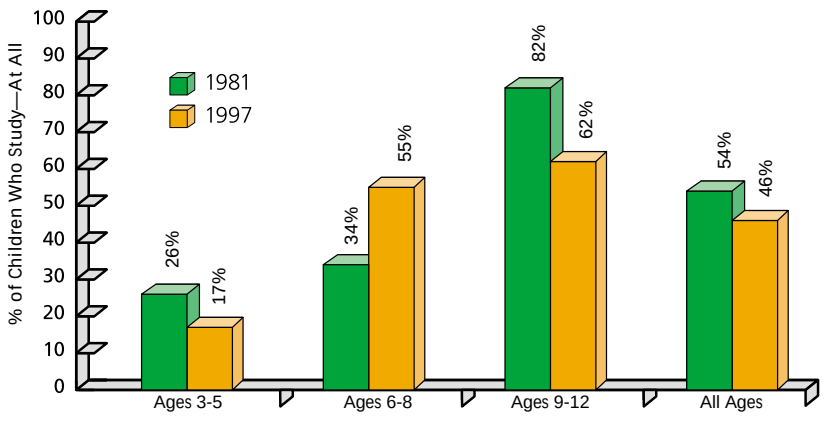
Loveless found students do much less homework than the PTA guidelines call for, particularly at higher grades. Using a variety of data sources, Loveless found:

- The average student spends less than an hour per day on homework;
- The homework load has changed little since the 1980s;
- Homework has increased for some students over the past decade, but not by much;
- Most parents think the current homework load is about right, but would rather see the amount increase than decrease.

HOMEWORK next page

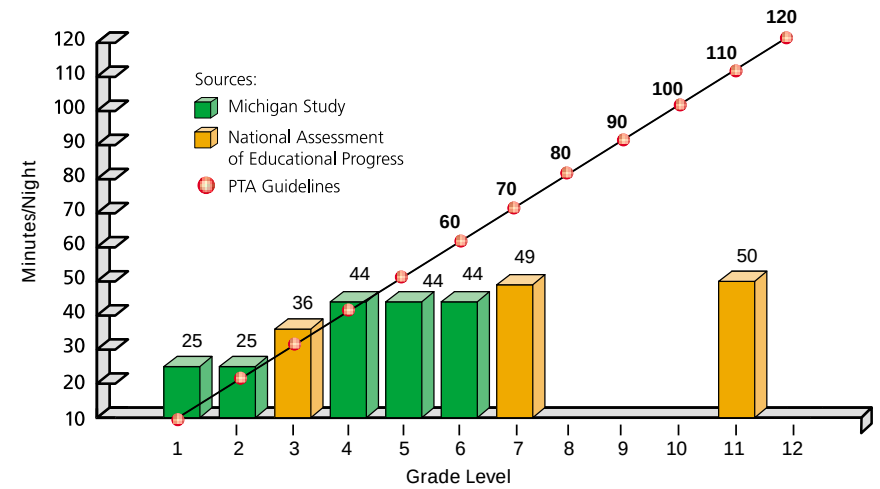
Fewer Doing Homework in1997 than in 1981

Except for ages 6-8, where still only one-half do homework



Homework — PTA Guidelines vs. Actual

On average, less than 1 hour per night



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Homework continued

A 1999 University of Michigan study showed students aged 6-8 studying just 25 minutes a night in 1997—up sharply from 10 minutes a night in 1981—with students aged 9-12 studying 44 minutes per night in 1997. However, the study also showed the percentage of children who do any homework at all actually fell from 1981 to 1997 for all age groups except 6-8. Nevertheless, the popular press misleadingly reported the Michigan survey as showing a huge increase in the homework burden.

Data collected for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show 9-year-olds studying a weighted average of just 36 minutes a night, 13-year-olds studying 49 minutes a night, and 17-year-olds studying 50 minutes a night.

In an ongoing survey of college freshmen, researchers at UCLA report the percentage of respondents who did more than one hour of homework per night in their senior year in high school dropped from 47 percent in 1987 to a new low of just 34 percent in 2002. In other words, two-thirds of college-bound high school seniors do no more than one hour of homework per night. Despite the record low homework burden, grade point averages are at record highs.

International Comparisons

When compared to students in other countries, the homework burden carried by U.S. students "is an extraordinarily light load," notes Loveless. Out of the 20 nations participating in the 1995 Third International Mathematics and Science Survey, the U.S. tied for next-to-last position in the number of hours per day spent studying or doing homework. In four countries—France, Italy, Russia, and South Africa—students spent at least twice as much time on homework as American students.

"There was no golden age of homework" in the U.S., said RAND social scientist Brian Gill, whose independent report on historical trends in homework will be released in December. "You can't find any point in the past 50 years when [American students] were doing a whole lot of homework." Even in the immediate post-Sputnik period, only one in four high school students was studying at least two hours a night.

Loveless suggests the following lessons for parents from the study:

- Parents should take anti-homework articles with a grain of salt, since "progressive" educators have been railing against homework for more than 100 years. For example, a public school teacher featured favorably in the current issue of *Teacher* magazine describes homework as a form of "academic violence."
- Follow PTA guidelines for homework.
- Understand that the homework workload will fluctuate day-to-day.
- If homework problems do exist, they should be solved between teachers and parents, not by legislators passing new laws.

George A. Clowes is managing editor of School Reform News. *His email address is* **clowes@heartland.org**.

U.S. Supreme Court Takes Up Pledge

Establishing religion or declaring a political philosophy?

by George A. Clowes

"I pledge allegiance to my flag and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."
Pledge, as originally written for 1892 Columbus Day

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."
Pledge, as amended in 1924 to clarify allegiance to which nation

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."
Pledge, as amended in 1954 to clarify source of rights

Getty

A class of Hispanic students recites the Pledge of Allegiance during a September 11 memorial service at Birdwell Elementary School in Tyler, Texas.

Next year, exactly 50 years after the U.S. Congress added the words "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance, the U.S. Supreme Court will rule on whether that addition violates the First Amendment's prohibition on the establishment of religion.

It won't be the first time the Court has ruled on the pledge. In 1943, the Court decided school boards could not expel students who refused to say the pledge. The issue currently before the Court is "whether a public school district policy that requires teachers to lead willing students in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, which includes the words 'under God,' violates the Constitution."

The case was prompted by Michael Newdow, a Sacramento doctor who sued on behalf of his daughter, who attended Elk Grove Unified School District in California. Newdow complained about his daughter having to observe her class reciting the pledge—a process he described as "a ritual proclaiming that there is a God."

On June 26, 2002, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled the recitation of the pledge with the words "under God" in public schools violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. On October 14, the U.S. Supreme Court announced it would take up the case, with a ruling expected by next June.

"The statement that the United States is a nation 'under God' is an endorsement of religion," concluded the Appeals Court. "It is a profession of a religious belief, namely, a belief in monotheism."

U.S. Solicitor General Theodore Olson disagreed.

"Whatever else the Establishment Clause may prohibit, this court's precedents make clear that it does not forbid the government from officially acknowledging the religious heritage, foundation and character of this nation," argued Olson in a petition to the U.S. Supreme Court in May.

Olson's argument was echoed in an *amicus* brief filed in support of the petitioners by the Knights of Columbus, a 1.7 million-member Catholic layman's organization that was instrumental in getting the words "under God" added to the pledge in 1954. As the brief notes, members of the Knights of Columbus have long understood that "American concepts of freedom flow from an authority higher than the State."

"Our American Government is founded on the concept of the individuality and the dignity of the human being. Underlying this concept is the belief that the human person is important because he was created by God and endowed by Him with certain inalienable rights which no civil authority may usurp," stated the House of Representatives' 1954 report on the joint resolution adding "under God" to the Pledge.

"The Pledge, like the Declaration [of Independence], is a statement of political philosophy, not of theology," argue the Knights in their brief. "Nevertheless, it is a statement of political philosophy that depends for its force on the premise that our rights are only inalienable because they inhere in a human nature that has been 'endowed' with such rights by its 'Creator.'"

Further linking the pledge to the Declaration, the brief concludes: "If reciting the Pledge is now unconstitutional because it refers to a nation 'under God,' then reading aloud the Declaration of Independence, which refers to the Creator as the source of our rights, must at least be suspect. That turns the American theory of rights exactly on its head."

More than 30 states have laws calling for the daily recitation of the pledge, according to the Education Commission of the States. In July, a federal court ruled a Pennsylvania pledge law unconstitutional, and in August, a federal judge blocked a Colorado pledge law.

George A. Clowes is managing editor of School Reform News. *His email address is* **clowes@heartland.org**.

INTERNET INFO

The Knights of Columbus *amicus* brief, plus a range of other resources on the Pledge of Allegiance issue, is available online at the Web site of the Pew Forum at **http://pewforum.org/religion-schools/pledge/**.

James Clavell's disturbing book, *The Children's Story* (Delacorte Press, 1981, first published in 1963), tells how easy it is for a young child's view of the Pledge of Allegiance and the flag to be completely turned around by a new teacher in just 20 minutes of class time.

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"Do What's Right"

An interview with Robert E. Gallagher

by George A. Clowes

"[Policymakers] have got to have the courage to make the right decision. Ultimately, they will be judged on the hard calls, not on the easy ones."

Parochial school administrators may do their best to keep tuition as low as possible, but often it is privately funded scholarships that make education at a private school a reality for many children from low-income families in the inner city.

And while large national programs like the Children's Scholarship Fund have focused attention on programs that distribute scholarships directly to student applicants by lottery, in fact there are many other highly successful, locally developed programs that have different mechanisms for funding and awarding scholarships. The Gallagher Scholars Program in Chicago is one such exemplary program.

The program was established in 1994 by Robert E. Gallagher and his wife, Isabel, through the Archdiocese of Chicago's Big Shoulders Fund. Big Shoulders was established by the late Joseph Cardinal Bernadin in 1986 to provide scholarship support for 111 inner-city Catholic schools in Chicago.

Bernadin emphasized that Catholic schools do not proselytize, but serve as "anchors within their neighborhoods," offering "a first-class education for both Catholics and non-Catholics." The character of Catholic schools, he said, helps students distinguish right from wrong, responsibility from irresponsibility, and active citizenship from passive citizenship.

Gallagher places a high value on the Catholic school education he received at St. Francis Xavier Elementary School and Loyola Academy, both in Wilmette, Illinois. Currently the chairman of Itasca, Illinois-based Arthur J. Gallagher & Co., one of the world's largest insurance brokers, Gallagher attributes part of his success in business to the quality foundation provided by his elementary and secondary Catholic schooling.

He put his education temporarily on hold during World War II to serve as a Navy pilot, returning to graduate from Cornell University in 1947 and join the nine-employee insurance brokerage firm his father had started 20 years earlier.

When Gallagher became president of the firm in 1963, it had grown to 19 employees with revenues of a half million dollars a year. By 2002, Gallagher had expanded the firm to 7,111 employees, with revenues topping a billion dollars and annual GAAP earnings of $130 million.

Active in philanthropy as well as in business, Gallagher has received numerous awards and honors. The most recent was two years ago, when he received the Elizabeth Ann Seton Award in a ceremony at the Ronald Reagan International Trade Center in Washington, DC. The award is presented annually by the National Catholic Education Association to recognize individuals whose professional and volunteer contributions have had a significant impact on Catholic education and children in the United States.

Gallagher recently spoke with *School Reform News* Managing Editor George Clowes.

The Code of Conduct for Gallagher Scholars

When they enter the program, each Gallagher Scholar receives a framed version of the Code of Conduct.

1. GOALS: Gallagher Scholars believe in setting goals and working hard to achieve them.
2. DISCIPLINE: Gallagher Scholars know that discipline is needed to follow an orderly path that leads to learning.
3. DEDICATION: Gallagher Scholars know that self-sacrifice is required in the learning process.
4. SELF-CONFIDENCE: Gallagher Scholars develop confidence in their abilities to achieve.
5. MOTIVATION: Gallagher Scholars know that those who achieve in any endeavor are highly motivated.
6. ATTENTION: Gallagher Scholars know that by staying alert and focused in class they will develop and learn to their potential.
7. PREPARATION: Gallagher Scholars work hard and develop study habits that make them prepared.
8. EFFORT: Gallagher Scholars know that it will take hard work to reach their objectives.
9. INTEGRITY: Gallagher Scholars believe in following a code of moral and ethical values.
10. RESPECT: Gallagher Scholars know that respect for parents, teachers and those in authority is a key to personal growth.
11. ATTITUDE: Gallagher Scholars know that a positive mental attitude expresses itself in everything they do and is key to future success and happiness.

Source: http://www.gallagherscholars.org

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Clowes: *How did you become involved in Catholic education?*

Gallagher: Cardinal Bernadin was a very dear friend. We had known him through a business relationship when he was in Cincinnati and then we became closer friends through the loss of our daughter to the same kind of cancer that claimed him about a year and a half later. He was very kind to her. But about nine years ago, he invited Isabel, my wife, and me to have dinner at his house with Monsignor Ken Velo. As Ken said later, "That was the most expensive dinner you ever attended."

The Cardinal knew I had always been concerned about inner-city children and the poor education they were getting in the public schools, and so he suggested I think about setting up a scholarship program to help these children get an education in the Catholic schools. It would be a program under my control, not something controlled by the Archdiocese.

I asked the Cardinal for some suggestions and he sent me several, but I didn't like any of them because I wanted something that was permanent. Permanency means endowment—the endowment pays for the full program—and so I created a foundation to do that, called the REG Charitable Trust. It funds the Gallagher Scholarship Program. We're now 11 years into our program. We just picked up the latest 50 students that started in fifth grade, to make a grand total of 550 Gallagher Scholars.

Our program is an eight-year program, from fifth to twelfth grade. We put the names of all the inner-city Catholic schools in a hat and I draw out 10 schools. The principals of those 10 schools then select five students each for the scholarships. The students don't apply for the scholarships, they're selected because they're bright, because they have an eagerness to learn, and because they have some support at home.

This is a scholars program, but they all have one thing in common: They're poor. These are inner-city schools and at-risk children.

Clowes: *So at any one time you have around 400 children in the program?*

Gallagher: Four hundred children, that's correct. The scholarships provide tuition assistance of $1,000 a year for the children in grade school, and $2,000 a year for the children in high school. That's $600,000 a year in perpetuity from the endowment fund.

When the program was first set up, I developed a code of conduct for the children, which became the road map of success. This code of conduct is given to all the children to learn and adopt when they come into the program. It involves goals, motivation, effort, attitude, and so on—11 items in all.

Another key component of the program is that we have about 125 businessmen and businesswomen from the city who act as mentors. They are volunteers, and they are the real heroes of this program—besides the teachers. I see all of the students five times a year, but it's the mentors who are with them all the time, one-on-one. It makes a huge difference when someone takes an interest in their lives.

Source: http://www.gallagherscholars.org

Robert E. Gallagher poses in 2002 with some of the new 5th grade Gallagher Scholars.

That's the whole thing: Somebody cares. Somebody loves them and wants them to succeed, but has certain rules and regulations. And in the parochial school system, you have discipline, you have ethics, you have morality, you have rules, you have love, you have learning, you have everything that our country needs to support our schools.

"[I]n the parochial school system, you have discipline, you have ethics, you have morality, you have rules, you have love, you have learning, you have everything that our country needs to support our schools."

We take nothing for granted, and try to help in every way we can to get them through high school. There's just tremendous pride that's been built over these last 11 years with the Gallagher Scholars. Everyone knows that some of these kids are among the smartest in the inner city.

We have eight years to watch the development of these children, and we really take that responsibility seriously. We have a fifth grade orientation that all the students come to for various talks. We have high school students who are going on to college come to visit the sixth grade children to spur them to go on through high school and to college. And what we've found with our high school students is that a good proportion can get scholarships for college.

In our first graduating class, we had 35 out of the 50 left after eight years, and I'd say 30 went on to college. In fact, our first batch of scholars are sophomores in college now, studying to be doctors, lawyers, engineers, and so on. But what I've preached into them is that when they're successful, they should come back to the neighborhoods and help others. So it's a round circle.

Clowes: *How do you think your program compares with other scholarship programs?*

Gallagher: I'm not too familiar with how the other programs work, but I do know my model works. That's number one. And number two, we have the parochial school system, which is the heart of this program. The results in the parochial schools speak for themselves: 34 percent of the students are non-Catholic; 81 percent are minorities; 99 percent graduate from grade school; 98 percent graduate from high school; and 85 percent or more go on to college.

On the other hand, the public schools in the inner city have failed, and putting more money in those schools is not going to make the children in them successful. This is not about money. This is about basics, like having the Ten Commandments, like having God in school, like having rules, like having regulations, like having discipline. Our rules are basic: no guns, no gangs, no drugs, no sex.

We need something else besides the public schools in the inner city. They are failures but they are kept open by the teacher unions because our politicians won't make the hard call and take them on. It is absolutely unconscionable. This is America, not socialism: When you fail, you shouldn't continue.

Clowes: *What would be your suggestions for some fundamental changes in those schools?*

Gallagher: I think the number one change is that we should re-examine our Founding Fathers and note they usually started every meeting with a prayer. Let's put God back in the public schools.

The other problem is that the public school monopoly is bankrupt, and throwing more money at it is just waste. In fact, we've been doing that for quite some time and all that it's proven is that money is not the issue. There has to be competition from vouchers and charter schools. I'm 1,000 percent for vouchers.

But most of all, we have to get the word out about what will happen to our country 20 years from now if we continue to produce a workforce that is 50 percent uneducated. We will get a licking from Europe and Asia the likes of which you've never seen. This is not just the kids being left behind, this is for us and our future. The United States will be left behind if we're not careful. We won't hold on to our markets without leaders in the workforce.

Clowes: *What one message would you like to send to policy makers about education issues?*

Gallagher: Make the right call. Have the courage to do what you know is right—and that is to open up the whole education system to competition. It isn't about the separation of church and state, it's about saving our country.

On the public side, we have inner city high schools that close their doors—lock them—at 2:30 in the afternoon, turning out thousands of children who have no place to go. There's nobody at home and nobody gives a darn about them in school. What are they going to do? They're going to join gangs, they're going to do drugs, they're going to gang-bang, and a lot of them will end up pregnant or in jail.

On the other side, we have a heroic parochial school system that has kept its schools going. Teachers are way underpaid, but they do it for love of learning, year after year turning out tremendous students with values and love and care and learning, and the politicians don't give a darn. "We can't give *them* anything," they say.

Yet it is the public schools that are failing. It's a very serious problem. We have allowed politicians to kowtow to the unions for the votes to stay re-elected. They've got to have the courage to make the right decision. Ultimately, they will be judged on the hard calls, not on the easy ones.

In the meantime, I'm so thankful to Cardinal Bernadin for changing my life by getting me involved in Catholic education. It's very satisfying, and it's fun. It's also very touching when a Mexican laborer with gnarled hands comes up to you, whacks you on the chest, and says, "If you ever need a heart, I'll give you mine."

We're having a great time. The students put on a seventh grade dinner, and this year it'll be all Irish, with corned beef and cabbage. But in previous years we've had soul food, Polish food, and we've been to Chinatown. It's beautiful. It's America. I'm so happy to be involved in the whole process.

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Flake

Continued from page 1

Allen into one of the nation's foremost Christian churches and non-profit corporations—and one of the Borough of Queens' three largest private-sector employers. The church has a 500-student private school, is involved in expansive commercial and residential development, and operates commercial and social service enterprises.

As a proponent of market-oriented community and economic development, Flake sponsored several innovative legislative initiatives to revitalize urban commercial and residential communities while he was a member of Congress. Passed with broad bipartisan support, those initiatives include the 1993 Bank Enterprise Act, whose provisions have increased private-sector capital flow in communities with declining economic fortunes.

While in Congress, Flake found his strong stand on school choice upset members of the Congressional Black Caucus, and so he persuaded then-chairman Rep. Maxine Waters to allow him to present and defend his views to the Caucus. He pointed out that all the blacks in Congress—himself included—had their children attending private schools. He also pointed out that the districts represented by Black Caucus members were the lowest-performing districts in their states.

After he had shared this information with Caucus members and explained his reasons for advocating school choice, many of them came up to him and whispered in his ear, "I'm supporting what you are about, but I cannot come out and publicly support it."

The great challenge, said Flake, is how to get lawmakers "to come out of the closet and deal with reality." If this system is not good enough for your child, he told Caucus members, it is not good enough for any child.

Starting a School

When Flake started the parochial school at Allen AME Church 20 years ago, people thought he had lost his mind. They don't think that way now. This year, Allen's students scored as high as the highest-performing public schools in the city.

Those scores were achieved despite the school having taken in a number of special education students. What Allen administrators discovered was that those students were simply young people with behavioral problems—not students who had disabilities and could not learn. In the Allen school environment, they know disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. As a result, the school has been able to graduate all its special education students.

"Some people believe that every child can learn, and, in the right environment, learning can indeed take place," explained Flake. "When a child walks into our school with a uniform on, they understand that it's a disciplined environment and that we will put you out of the school if you do not perform, not necessarily academically, but certainly in terms of behavior. Then they automatically change."

Flake was harshly critical of how students with behavioral problems are handled in the public schools, where they often are placed in special education since teachers and administrators don't seem to know what to do with such children.

"I am convinced [special education] needs to be eliminated," said Flake, pointing out that special education has created its own cottage industry for lawyers, teachers, and administrators. At the same time, the federal government is pushing dollars into the program on the assumption that the young people going into special education eventually come out of it.

"The truth is: they don't," said Flake, explaining students usually stay in the program until they drift off into the streets. Lacking the necessary skills to provide for themselves, they look for other ways and begin committing acts of crime. Those acts of crime ultimately lead to a growing population of persons who are incarcerated. As a result, said Flake, "we're continually spending more and more dollars trying to build jails in which to house them."

Affirmative action would not be necessary if everyone in America had access to a quality education, noted Flake. But as long as public education is controlled by a monopoly that determines who gets a quality education and who doesn't, "there will always be some who are left behind," he said.

George A. Clowes is managing editor of School Reform News. *His email address is* **clowes@heartland.org**.

Black-White Achievement Gap Is Widening

Although a new report about the education of blacks in the U.S. shows evidence of some progress, U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige recently warned there remains much work to do to improve education for all children and to close an achievement gap that has widened over the past two decades.

"[D]espite the work of so many good people, we have a crisis that we can no longer afford to ignore," said Paige on October 14, addressing the Mississippi Association of Colleges and Universities in Jackson. "Millions of students are attending school but are not learning. Each student poorly educated is a tragedy."

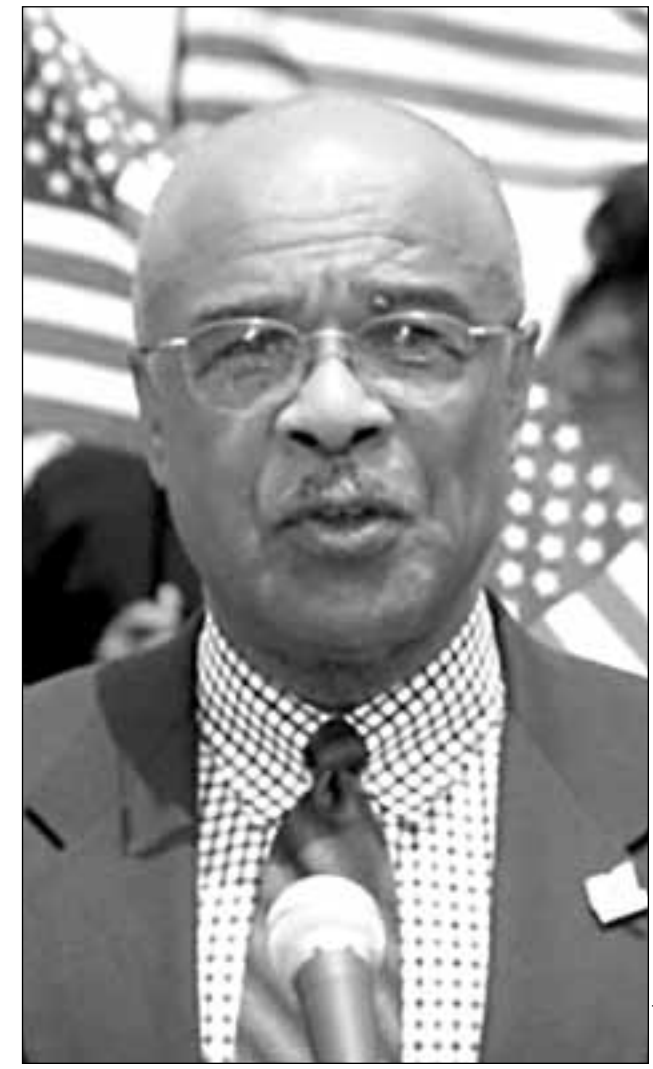
According to the report, performance gaps between black and white students ages 13-17 have widened between 1988 and 1999. Gaps in reading achievement showed no evidence of narrowing during the 1990s. When students leave school and enter the workforce, lower performance measures translate into lower pay and higher unemployment rates for equal levels of education.

On the plus side, more blacks have completed high school and gone on to college than in the past, levels of parental education of black children have increased, the number of black individuals and families below the poverty level has decreased, and in 1999, a higher percentage of black and Hispanic children than white children attended public schools chosen by their parents.

—*G.C.*

INTERNET INFO

The September 2003 Report from the National Center for Education Statistics, "Status and Trends in the Education of Blacks," is available online at the U.S. Department of Education's Web site at **http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/2003034.pdf**.



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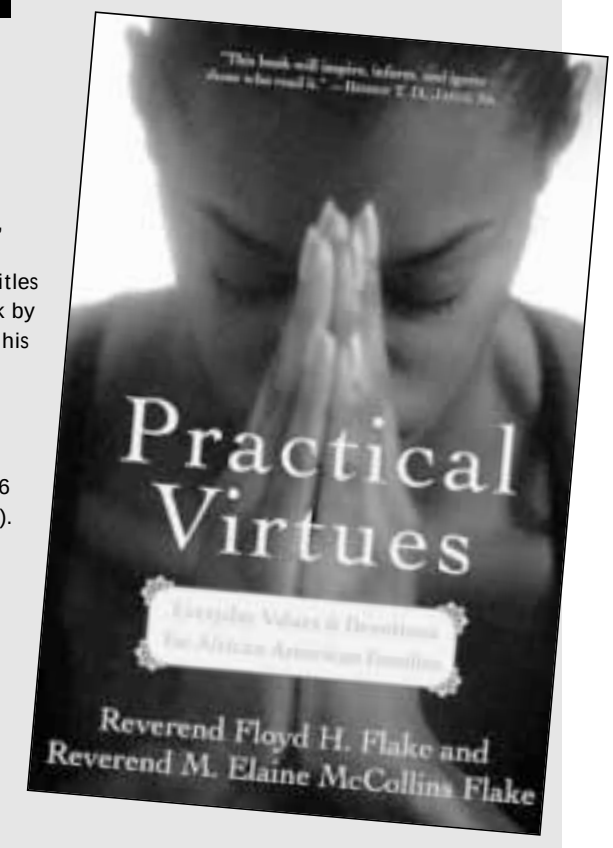
U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige

Practical Virtues

Courage, Diligence, Faith, Forbearance, Forgiveness, Honesty, Love, Loyalty, Prudence, Responsibility, Service, and Trustworthiness—those are the titles of the 12 chapters of a new book by the Reverend Floyd H. Flake and his wife, A.M.E. co-pastor Elaine McCollins Flake, called *Practical Virtues : Everyday Values and Devotions for African American Families* (Amistad Press, 2003; 416 pages; ISBN: 006009060X; $24.95).

To illustrate and to provide understanding of each of these 12 virtues, the Flakes have gathered a rich selection of their favorite stories, letters, hymns, narratives, and poems. In addition, they provide practical ideas for discussion and further reflection on how to "Exercise Virtue."

—*G.C.*



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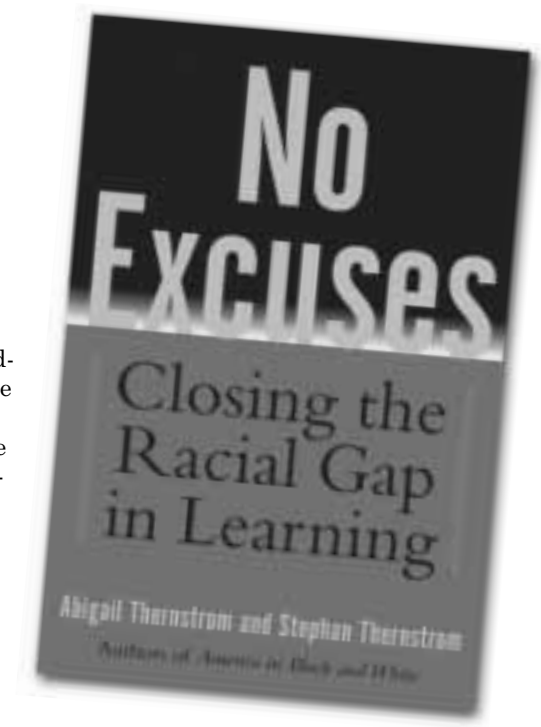
An Uncomfortable Analysis of the Racial Learning Gap



If culture is the problem, what is the solution?

by Kelly Amis Stewart

In their new book *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning* (Simon & Schuster, October 2003; 352 pages, $26.00; ISBN: 0743204468), Abigail and Stephen Thernstrom confront the bleak reality that black and Latino students continue to trail far behind their white peers in American schools, despite decades of effort and resources directed at reducing that achievement gap.

For those in the education field in particular, this isn't news, but the Thernstroms' determination to sort methodically through possible explanations and uncover root causes—no matter how discouraging, uncomfortable, or controversial they may be—is what makes this book a compelling read for anyone concerned with one of the great shames of American education.

"Ignorance is often comfortable ground on which to stand," the authors assert, "... yet this is a problem that requires the sort of radical reform that only discomfort and anger will inspire."

Gap Cannot Be Denied

The Thernstroms first lay out the evidence, primarily provided by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), to show there is no facile way to dismiss the achievement gap: From any angle, black and Latino students are performing at significantly lower levels than their white and Asian peers.

Oft-cited reasons like family income, parental education levels, inequitable school funding, and teacher bias provide some explanation, they argue, but do not begin to explain away the appalling size of the gap nor its seeming intractability during decades of significant social change—including the leveling of many playing fields and upward mobility for blacks in particular—and direct attention paid to the problem, as exemplified by the federal Head Start and Title I programs.

"[I]f culture does play an enormous role in determining how entire groups of Americans perform in the education arena, as they believe, the fundamental change needed to solve the problem is 'much more radical than that contemplated by the most visionary of today's public school officials.'"

And why is it, the Thernstroms wonder, that Asian minority students are not also trailing white majority students, but indeed are creating an achievement gap stretching in the other direction as their test scores, graduation rates, and entry levels at the nation's most prestigious colleges rocket ahead of whites? They wonder, "How can that be in an allegedly racist society?"

Importance of Culture

Their answer will make some readers uncomfortable even if it rings true at some visceral level: *culture*.

"Some group cultures are more academically advantageous than others," they state.

The Thernstroms contend the Asian-American culture is particularly advantageous, with "Asian parents typically [expecting] their children to work extraordinarily hard in school—and the children do ..." They point out Asian-American students spend more time on homework and much less watching television, playing sports, or working in part-time jobs than their peers.

In a study by Laurence Steinberg that is cited in *No Excuses*, students were asked what was the lowest grade they thought they could receive without their parents getting angry. Asian-American students said, "A-," white students replied, "B-," and black and Latino students said "C-."

In addition to the different parental expectations those answers indicate, the authors contend a variety of other cultural factors keep Latino and black student academic achievement levels down, although the mix is certainly different in each case.

For example, Latinos' achievement levels as a group reflect not just the constant addition of new immigrant children to the mix, but also reluctance to embrace the English language and even the United States as home. The Thernstroms refer to an "unusually strong attachment of Hispanics to the language of their original homeland" and suggest "they seem to be much more ambivalent than European or Asian immigrants about making a permanent commitment to living in the United States, and are thus more resistant to assimilation."

For black students, factors discussed include some that are already identified and well-known—like the preponderance of single-parent households and young mothers—as well as some suppositions about parenting practices that are not entirely convincing.

The "astonishing amount of time" black children spend watching television seems to be the primary factor newly unearthed and presented as playing a significant role in black student underachievement. Yet, the Thernstroms also admit television watching "is ubiquitous among American children whatever their race."

Intriguing, But Not Satisfying

Having taken the dive into such perilous waters, trying to define the cultural behaviors or norms that result in poor student performance, the Thernstroms offer conclusions regarding black students, as well as Latino students, that are intriguing but unsatisfying to this reader. Also unconvincing is the summary dismissal of racism in the classroom—teachers having different expectations for children of different races—or even in the world at large as a possible factor.

Perhaps the answers are impossible to quantify through research. As Donald Hense, founder of Friendship-Edison, the largest charter school in Washington, DC, points out, black children live not only in the wake of the culture their elders carry with them, but also in an American culture that sends many clear messages directly to them.

"Many of our kids have experienced disappointment in ways that you cannot imagine," says Hense, "so much so that they don't expect to see the finish line. When the first obstacle appears, they quit."

The Thernstroms never suggest culture is educational destiny. In fact, they clearly and firmly oppose that conclusion. But they do point out that, if culture does play an enormous role in determining how entire groups of Americans perform in the education arena, as they believe, the fundamental change needed to solve the problem is "much more radical than that contemplated by the most visionary of today's public school officials."

This has both the resonance of truth and a ring of prescience. But addressing the daunting challenges that *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning* puts forth may require more profound remedies than those supported in the book—better standards and tests, improved teacher quality, and more school choice—which are now almost conventional tools. It is a challenge to the authors, and all of us, to keep digging.

Kelly Amis Stewart is an education consultant and coauthor of Making it Count: A Guide to High-Impact Education Philanthropy *with Chester E. Finn, Jr. Her email address is* **KLAmis@aol.com**.

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Identifying the Real Costs of Public Education

by George A. Clowes

In a speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Washington, DC on January 17, 1925, President Calvin Coolidge said, "[T]he chief business of the American people is business." If Coolidge were speaking to newspaper editors today he would likely say, "The chief business of the American people is education."

Education, indeed, is one of America's largest industries. In the fall of 2002, some 78 million people in the U.S. were involved in providing or receiving formal education, with total expenditures for public and private education from prekindergarten to graduate school estimated to be nearly $700 billion for the school year 2001-02. About 60 percent of that total, or $423 billion, was spent on public and private elementary and secondary education.

However, as an important new book demonstrates, the largest component of that spending—public education—understates the actual costs by a significant amount. Although the exact amount of the understatement is often difficult to quantify, the nature of the understatement is detailed in *Public Education as a Business: Real Costs and Accountability*, by Myron Lieberman and Charlene K. Haar, who are both with the Education Policy Institute in Washington, DC and the Social Philosophy and Policy Center at Bowling Green State University in Ohio.

While accurate reporting of costs in private-sector businesses has become a major public policy issue in recent years, accurate reporting of costs in the public sector "is usually taken for granted," the authors point out. That, they make clear, is a big mistake.

Lieberman and Haar identify three kinds of costs that are not included in the figures provided by government agencies and cited by the media as current per-pupil expenditures in public elementary and secondary schools:

- Costs met by educational government agencies, such as costs for capital outlays, interest, debt service, unfunded pensions and other post-retirement costs, plus expenses met by public school foundations;
- K-12 education costs incurred in non-educational public agencies, such as tax collection agencies, prisons, Indian reservations, and Department of Defense and Department of State schools;
- The nongovernmental costs of K-12 public education, such as the cost of remedial education paid for by parents.

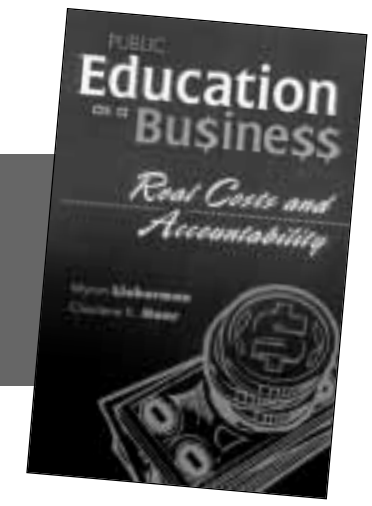
These cost omissions are significant. For example, the authors contend that excluding capital outlay, interest, and debt service leads to a 15 percent or more underestimate of the per-pupil cost in average daily attendance in public schools. Also, a 2001 study estimated that eliminating unfunded public employee pension liabilities in Oregon could add $1,207 per year to per-pupil costs for the next 40 years.

Because of its subject matter, *Public Education As a Business* is not an easy book to read, except perhaps for accountants and financial analysts, but it is a book that should be read widely. Although its insights will be helpful to public school officials and school reform advocates, they will be particularly enlightening to education reporters and education policymakers, for whom the book should be required reading.

"It is ... remarkable," note the authors, "that so little attention has been paid to the erroneous government statistics on the costs of public education."

Public Education As a Business:
Real Costs and Accountability

Myron Lieberman and Charlene K. Haar (Scarecrow Press, 2003;232 pages; $32.95; ISBN: 0810847191)



George A. Clowes is managing editor of School Reform News. *His email address is* **clowes@heartland.org**.

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Making the Ideal Public School the Enemy of Choice

by George A. Clowes

Voltaire famously said, "The best is the enemy of the good," but an insightful new book from the Hoover Institution's prolific Koret Task Force illustrates how the *ideal* also can be turned into an enemy of the good.

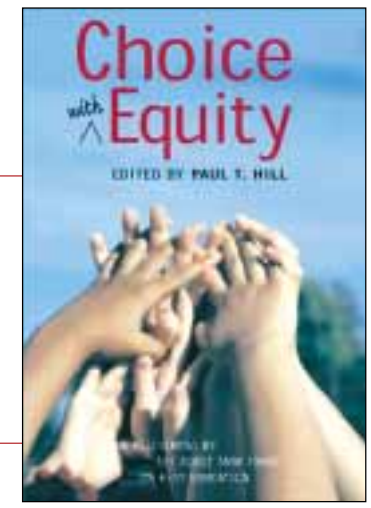
Critics of school choice frequently argue that charter schools, vouchers, and other programs that allow parents to choose their child's school will produce a variety of undesirable social outcomes, such as "skimming" off the best students, drawing the most committed parents away from troubled schools, increasing segregation, and leaving poor and minority students in the worst schools. When compared to the model public school that brings together students from all ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, and ability groups to educate them in harmony, voucher schools and charter schools are often found wanting.

That's an unfair comparison, say University of Washington researchers Paul T. Hill and Kacey Guin in the opening chapter of the Koret Task Force book, *Choice With Equity*, which is edited by Hill. In "Baselines for Assessment of Choice Programs," the two researchers contend school choice programs should be compared to the public school system as it exists today, not to its "idealized aspirations." In a more real-world comparison, it is the public schools that are found wanting.

In fact, conclude Hill and Guin, "it is hard to see how choice could produce worse segregation, resource inequity, denial of access to excellent programs, or assignment to opportunity-limiting programs than the current system."

Choice With Equity:
An Assessment by the Koret Task Force on K-12 Education

Edited by Paul T. Hill
Hoover Institution Press, 2002
222 pages $15; ISBN: 0817938923



They show the existing public education system has the following flaws:

- It restricts choice by assigning children to schools and limiting the supply of available publicly funded schools;
- It does not accomplish desegregation or give disadvantaged children equitable access to good schools;
- Despite decades of effort, public school systems still are segregated, and in fact the separation of white and minority students has increased since 1998.

Even more startling, Hill and Guin cite the following examples to show that the existing public education system actually *creates inequities that are unlikely to occur under choice*:

- It allows the best-paid teachers to become concentrated in middle-class schools, creating inequities in per-pupil spending;
- It allocates better learning opportunities and programs disproportionately to schools serving children of higher-income, well-educated parents;
- It assigns poor and minority students disproportionately to low-track courses; and,
- It assigns minority children to forms of special education that virtually guarantee they will drop out before graduating from high school.

"Choice programs must not be ruled out because they can lead to some inequities," argue Hill and Guin. "Every system of allocating opportunities known to man creates some inequities."

Whether choice programs do in fact produce worse outcomes than the present system is a question that must await the establishment of a sufficiently large and long-lasting choice experiment, something opponents have worked hard to prevent.

The book's remaining chapters present evidence of the benefits that school choice brings to children, to families, and to public schools. The concluding chapter by Terry M. Moe will be particularly helpful to school choice advocates since it discusses a variety of issues that need to be considered in actually designing a school choice program.

"Whatever one's values may be, and even if one puts almost exclusive emphasis on social equity," Moe writes, "it is difficult to argue that American Education should not move toward a greater reliance on choice and competition."

George A. Clowes is managing editor of School Reform News. *His email address is* **clowes@heartland.org**.

INTERNET INFO

A related article by Paul T. Hill and Kacey Guin, also called "Baselines for Assessment of Choice Programs," was published in the October 20, 2003 issue of the Education Policy Analysis Archives and is available online at **http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v11n39**.

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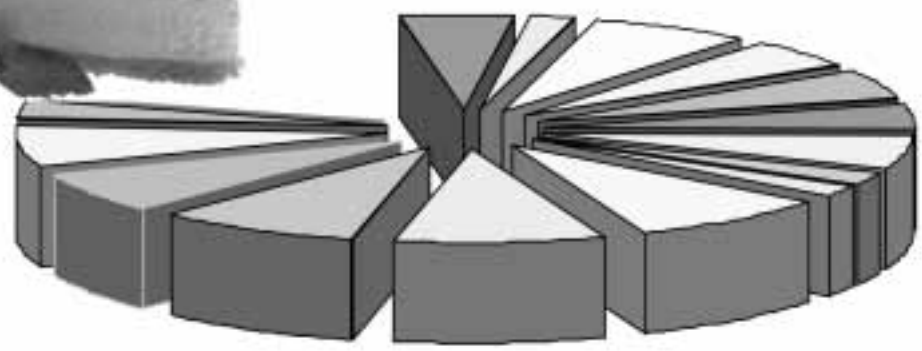

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